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THE PROPHETS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT
AND THEIR MESSAGE

THE PROPHETS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT AND THEIR MESSAGE

LESSONS FOR SCHOOLS AND BIBLE
CLASSES

BY

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PREFACE

THESE Notes for Lessons on the Prophets were originally drawn up in connexion with the new Syllabus of Religious Instruction for Elementary Church Schools, in the Diocese of Winchester, which has just been issued.* They can, however, be used without any reference to that Syllabus, as they form an independent course of instruction, which is also suitable for Secondary Schools or Bible Classes. I hope that they may be so used, and used widely, for they deal with a subject which ought to be taught in every school. The Prophets are the key to the Old Testament, yet how few people know anything about them !

Provision is made for a three years' course of lessons, the heads of which are given below. The Notes follow the order of the lessons, and for every lesson notes will be found.

A year's course consists of six Lesson Heads, each sub-divided into four, making twenty-four lessons in all ; but teachers must exercise their own judgment in the matter of utilizing the material provided in the Notes. Sometimes two lessons may be required for a sub-head ; sometimes two sub-heads may be taken in one lesson.

It will, however, I think, usually be found that not all the material can be used, and that a selection from it must be made. Some of the lessons have been sketched out in full ; more often only notes are given.

My object has been twofold : (a) to give the teacher

* To be obtained 1s. 2d. post free from Warren and Son, Winchester.

some idea of the important part played by prophecy in the religion of the Old Testament, and of the very varied character of a Prophet's work ; (b) to provide him with adequate material for a continuous course of teaching.

To nearly all the children in our schools and to the majority of the teachers the Prophets are a sealed book. Yet there is no more interesting subject for study in the whole Bible, and hardly any which affords better opportunity for fresh and dramatic teaching. The extraordinary modernness of the Prophets must strike any careful student. Their message is perennially new and applicable to our own times.

Teachers may possibly find the subject difficult at first owing to its unfamiliarity, but a little patient study will soon let in the light, and the teacher will have his reward in a fresh and growing interest in the work of the Prophets.

I hope that some who use these Notes will be led on to read¹ some of the books suggested for further study ; and in² particular Sir George Adam Smith's inspiring volumes on *Isaiah* and *The Book of the Twelve Prophets*.

V. F. STORR.

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* For these courses three books are useful: 1. *Century Bible*, volume on "Minor Prophets." 2. Rowton, *The Making of the Bible*. 3. Moberly, *The Old Testament in Modern Light*. The volumes on the various prophets in the *Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges* will be found helpful.

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TABLE OF DATES

It may be found helpful to the teacher if a brief chronological table is given, covering the period dealt with in the lessons. Not all the dates can be regarded as exact, it being impossible to determine some of them with precision. But those that are doubtful are approximately correct. The main purpose of the table is to show the period in which each prophet carried on his work.

1. THE NORTHERN KINGDOM OF ISRAEL.

B.C.		
783-743.	Jeroboam II.	} Amos prophesied in N. Kingdom about 760-750.
743.	Zechariah (6 months).	
743.	Shallum (1 month).	
743-737.	Menahem.	
737.	Pekahiah.	
736.	Pekah.	
731.	Hoshea.	
721.	<i>Fall of Samaria, Captivity of N. Kingdom by Sargon, King of Assyria.</i>	

2. THE SOUTHERN KINGDOM OF JUDAH.

778-740.	Uzziah.	
740.	Jotham.	} Isaiah prophesied 742-701. Hosea " 745-737. Micah " 720-695. Jeremiah " 627-586. Ezekiel " 597-570. Nineveh and the Assyrian Empire fell before the power of Babylon, 607.
736.	Ahaz.	
727-695.	Hezekiah.	
701.	Invasion of Judah by Sennacherib.	
695-641.	Manasseh.	
641.	Ammon.	
639-618.	Josiah.	
608.	Jehoahaz (3 months).	
608-597.	Jehoiakim.	
597.	Jehoiachin (3 months).	
597.	<i>First exile to Babylon.</i>	
586.	<i>Capture of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, and Second exile.</i>	

3. THE EXILE AND THE RETURN.

538.	<i>Return of exiles by decree of Cyrus.</i>	} Isaiah xl.-xlviii. is the work of a prophet who lived between 555 and 538. The rest of the book is composed of various prophecies not all by the same hand, some dating from before the exile, some subsequent to it. The whole section, xl.-end, was probably put together by an editor soon after the return from exile. It is known as Second Isaiah. Haggai prophesied about 520. Zechariah prophesied about 520. The Book of Jonah cannot be dated with certainty. It is later than 600, and may be as late as 300 B.C. Babylon fell before the power of Persia, 538. Cyrus was the first king of the new Persian Empire.
520.	Rebuilding of Temple begun.	
516.	Temple completed.	

The Prophets of the Old Testament and their Message

COURSE I

LESSON I. WHAT IS A PROPHET? THE WORK OF A PROPHET

(a) NEARLY all children will say "one who can tell what is going to happen in the future," and have no other idea of his work. There is an element of prediction in prophecy, but it is not the most important. A prophet is a *forth-teller* rather than a *fore-teller*. He is one who speaks for God—God's messenger, ambassador, witness. His work varied and many-sided. In all of it he witnesses for God and morality.

(b) The following examples show some aspects of a prophet's work: (1) *Reproving national sins*, e.g. luxury (Isa. 3. 16-26; Amos 6. 4-7); oppression of poor by rich (Micah 2. 1, 2; Amos 5. 11; Isa. 5. 8); cheating (Amos 8. 5); bribery (Amos 5. 12; Isa. 5. 23); (2) *Attack on idolatry* (Isa. 2. 8, 9; 44. 9-20; Jer. 51. 17, 18); (3) *Attack on formal religion* (Isa. 1. 10-17; Amos 5. 21-24; Micah 6. 6-8); (4) *Reproving individuals*, Nathan and David (2 Sam. 12. 1-14); Elijah and Ahab (2 Kings 21. 17-end).

In every case the prophet upholds God's standard of truth and right, and shows that religion is a practical thing, and has to do with everyday life. He is a man

sure of God, with a vivid sense of God's presence. He teaches that God is real and living, and watches and judges men and nations. Emphasize this point of the prophet's sense of God.

(c) *How the prophet received his message.* But, first, why was there any message at all to deliver? Because God wished to reveal Himself to men. God has always been making Himself known to the world, and is doing so to-day. He selected the Hebrew race to be a special channel for this revelation of Himself. The Bible is the record of God's self-revealing through a chosen race. Dwell on this character of God, as one who wants to draw near to men and teach them. It prepares the way for the fuller revelation of Him as Father loving the world. The revelation to Moses (Exod. 3). Here "I am that I am" is better rendered "I will become what I will become." That is, God says in effect—"Trust Me and you shall see how I will teach you, guide and bless you." In the Old Testament you have the story of God's progressive self-revelation. "*The word of the Lord came unto me.*" How explain this and similar phrases? There was no audible voice of God; the message came to the prophet's soul. There was no dictation of the message, the prophet writing down exactly what his inner ear heard. But God's Spirit moved him to utter some truth about God which was needed. On the prophet's part there was continuous preparation by prayer, meditation, study of the past history of the nation, self-discipline, such as fasting. In every possible way the prophet sought to find out what God's will was. He "waited upon" God, as we may do to-day. Then the impulse from God came. He felt within himself a burning conviction. He *must* speak, *must* give his message. But he gave it in his own way and style. Note how the styles of the various prophets differ.

Thus there is a human element as well as a divine element in prophecy. Note also how sure the prophets are that their message is from God ; they speak with complete confidence and certainty. They are sure of their message because they are sure of God.

We learn this very important lesson that *God works through men*. God cannot do His work unless He can find men to be His instruments. This is as true to-day as it was then.

(d) *Modern prophets*. Are prophets extinct ? There is no order or class of prophets to-day, and modern history shows nothing parallel to the continuous and connected movement of prophecy found in the Old Testament. But the same spiritual conditions are present. God is real, near, wishing to reveal Himself, wishing to work through man. The work of the Holy Spirit is real. It is His work to guide us into all truth, and to cleanse and illuminate the heart and mind. Man can still seek and find God ; God can still act on the human soul. Hence a modern prophet is not an impossibility. There have been individuals to whom the name of prophet can fairly be given, e.g. Savonarola, John Wesley. If a great reformer arose who should, in the name of God, rouse the conscience of the nation about some national sin, should we not call him a prophet ?

Question here about our modern national sins.

In our degree we can all be prophets—speakers for God, taught and used by Him. But the Hebrew prophets really stand alone for two main reasons : (a) They reached a far higher conception of God than any other nation, and have taught the world about God ; (b) they belong to a great movement of prophecy, limited to that one nation, a movement pointing forward to a great fulfilment in Christ.

Because of this they stand alone. But in the stories of their lives we can find lessons fresh and living for us to-day.

LESSON II. PROPHETS AT WORK

TAKE two familiar examples as the best way of introducing a new subject to the class.

(1) Elijah (*a*) on Mt. Carmel (2 Kings 18.); (*b*) reproving Ahab over Naboth's vineyard (2 Kings 21.).

(2) St. John Baptist (*a*) at the Jordan (Matt. 3; Luke 3); (*b*) reproving Herod (Matt. 14. 1-12). Only very brief notes needed for teacher.

(*a*) *Elijah on Carmel.*

The prophet speaks for true religion against Baal worship. He is called to be the leader in a great reformation of national religion. His loneliness, one man against eight hundred and fifty false prophets, without any sure support from the people. The courage needed in face of hostility of Ahab and Jezebel. The source of his strength was God. Note his prayer (*v.* 36). Chapter 19. shows how great the strain was.

(*b*) *Elijah and Ahab.*

Here the prophet deals with one man. Courage needed to reprove a king; but the king should be an example to his people. Evidently Ahab a weak man, under the power of Jezebel.

These points to be brought out: (1) Sin abhorrent to God. (2) Sin inevitably brings punishment. (3) Yet repentance always possible (*v.* 29). The prophets in denouncing sin and predicting punishment point out the possibility of reformation and pardon. (4) "Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?" (*v.* 20). Was not this the cry of a guilty conscience? It was Ahab who

compelled Elijah to be his enemy, just as we can make God our enemy, when all the while He wants to be our Friend.

(c) *St. John Baptist at the Jordan.*

How he resembles an Old Testament prophet (a) in dress like Elijah (cp. 2 Kings 1. 8 and Matt. 3. 4); (b) like Elijah in haunting lonely desert places; (c) spoke for God with a somewhat stern message; (d) the fore-runner of Jesus—but all the prophets were that in their degree.

See him at his work. His message, "Repent ye; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." His baptizing—a symbol of cleansing, of the "death unto sin and the new birth unto righteousness." How he dealt with the different groups which came to him: (1) Pharisees and Sadducees (Matt. 3. 7-10)—denounces them—because of their pride and hypocrisy. Their pride of race cannot save them. (2) Soldiers (Luke 3. 14). (3) Tax-gatherers (Luke 3. 12, 13). The Romans let out the taxes, and so long as the collector paid the sum required did not mind if he exacted for his own benefit more—cp. Zacchæus (Luke 19. 8). (4) The mass of people (Luke 3. 10, 11)—let them show charity and kindness.

Note how he insists that religion is not a mere matter of observance and ceremonies, but of conduct in daily life.

His message of God's judgment and punishment (Matt. 3. 12). His humility and self-effacement (3. 11) He was but a messenger, a "voice" (John 1. 23; 3. 30). What Jesus said of him (Matt. 11. 11).

(d) *St. John Baptist and Herod.*

St. John imprisoned (Matt. 14. 3). As Elijah reprov'd Ahab, so he reprov'd Herod, and suffered for it. Imprisoned in gloomy castle of Machaerus on east

side of Dead Sea. It was illegal for Herod to marry Herodias for her husband was alive, and even if he had been dead marriage with a sister-in-law was forbidden (Lev. 18. 16).

He suffered worse than imprisonment—was executed. Tell the story. It was a courageous thing of the disciples to ask for his body, and that Herod granted their request shows that he was sorry. Herod should not have made his boastful promise. Having made it, was he right to keep it? Many care more for what people think of them than for what is really wrong.

If Ahab had a guilty conscience when he saw Elijah, so had Herod when he heard of the miracles of Jesus (Matt. 3. 2). The presence of a prophet must have been a perpetual warning to the wrong-doer. The silent influence of a good life or noble character.

How can we copy St. John and Elijah? Do we need their message?

LESSON III. THE LIFE AND WORK OF AMOS

(a) 1. *Who he was*—cp. 1. 1 and 7. 14, 15.

We learn he was a shepherd living at Tekoa, a small place on the high ground of Judah, twelve miles south of Jerusalem, rough, wild country. The word "herdman" means keeper of a peculiar breed of sheep, small, with short legs, but famous for their wool. He was also "a gatherer" (or dresser) of sycamore fruit, not our sycamore, but the fig-mulberry, shady and the size of a walnut tree. An insect lives in the fruit, and the fruit cannot be eaten till a hole has been made in it so that the insect may escape. ¶ He was a rough, simple man, living a lonely, wandering life, and travelling to the northern kingdom of Samaria to sell his wool. Though he was a southerner he prophesied in the north. He prophesied about 760-750 B.C. (1. 1).

2. *His call.* All he tells us is in 7. 15. The call came while he was shepherding. What preparation had he? The preparation which a lonely life in the desert gives. Need of vigilance and keen sight in the desert. Is that a wild beast coming? Who is that moving in the distance, friend or foe? Note how full of reference to desert life his prophecies are—e.g. chapter 3. His loneliness would make him think of God. How often the desert has been the home of religion—Mohammedanism; or Elijah and John Baptist. Our Lord was tempted in the wilderness. St. Paul after his conversion went for three years to Arabia (Gal. I. 17, 18) to think about God. Amos must have been gradually taught by God until he was ready. What made him finally prophesy was the sin and luxury and irreligion he saw in the north.

We learn (1) God chooses very different kinds of men to be His messengers. Amos had had no official training in one of the schools or colleges of the prophets (that is what 7. 14 means). He was called while at his ordinary work. He was just a simple shepherd, but with a keen eye for God and spiritual things. (2) To be alone, to “study to be quiet” is often the best way to learn about God. One of our modern dangers is that we do not give ourselves times to be alone with God, or to “practise the presence of God.”

One interesting point—Amos was the first of the writing prophets—the earliest whose writings have come down to us.

(b) *What he found on his journeys to the north.*

See the sin he attacks: (1) Oppression of poor (5. 11; 8. 6). (2) Luxury (6. 4-6). Under Jeroboam II the northern kingdom had become very powerful and rich. Note how a man of simple habits like Amos would scorn

the luxury he saw ; how it would rouse his anger. (3) Unreal and hollow religion (4. 4, 5 ; 8. 5 ; 5. 21-23). Outward observance in plenty, but no worship of God with the heart and will.

What was his message ? (1) God sees and notes it all (9. 2, 3). (2) God demands a holy life (5. 14, 15). (3) God will punish (6. 14). Amos sees the Assyrians coming, as they did soon after, to carry away the people into captivity. There is hardly a note of tenderness in all his writings. His message is one of stern denunciation (9. 8 ; 8. 8-10). (4) The greatness and power of God (5. 8 ; 9. 6, 7).

(c) The great crisis in the life of Amos. The climax at Bethel.

Picture him going to and fro with his wool, and prophesying, warning, threatening, denouncing, attacking chiefly the nobles, for the fault was mainly theirs. He became a well-known figure—cp. 7. 10 where his name was evidently familiar to the king. At last Amos decides on a bold step. He will preach at Bethel (chapter 7) where the king had his royal chapel, and where Amaziah the king's priest was. Think of the courage needed ; and, so far as we know, Amos was alone and had no friends. He selected probably a festival day when many would be at Bethel. He probably began by speaking the words in 7. 1-9. We have here three pictures—locusts, drought, and a plumbline. For first two compare 4. 6, 7. There had been a visitation of locusts with resulting famine ; and then a terrible drought, which had scorched the land (cp. 1 Kings 18. 5). God had sent these as warnings, and Amos had on these two occasions prayed for the people that they might be forgiven. But the warnings had passed unheeded. Now it was too late. He puts his message of judgment

in the form of a picture of a builder testing a wall with a line. If the wall crooked it won't stand, and must be pulled down and rebuilt. The nation was tested by God, found crooked, and would be destroyed.

(v. 9). Amos threatens the royal house. This roused the anger of Amaziah the king's priest. He sent to the king this message : (1) Amos is conspiring against thee. But a conspiracy means at least two people, and Amos had no confederate. Nor had Amos spoken against the king by name, only against the royal house. (2) "The land is not able to bear all his words"—we have had enough of this man. Probably the king gave orders to send him away. At any rate, Amaziah bids him begone (7. 12)—and tells him to earn his bread by prophesying as the professional prophets did. This makes Amos say that he is no professional prophet, and does not prophesy for money. Amaziah is angry that he dares to speak thus in Bethel the king's chapel. He was a courtier, and cared more for the royal favour than for God. Amos predicts terrible things for Amaziah and the land. He probably then returned home and put his prophecies into writing.

This is a wonderful scene, and well worth developing for the class. The solitary prophet against the power of king and nobles—official religion and the true religion of morality and right conduct—the representative of a simple life against riches and luxury—the champion of the poor against the wealthy. The dramatic elements in the situation should be brought out.

(d) *The central thought of the teaching of Amos.*

Is contained in 3. 2. Privilege implies responsibility ; the greater the privilege the greater is the responsibility. "You only have I known." Trace out what the special privileges of the nation had been, their selection, training,

history. Why were they chosen? It was not because they were 'God's favourites (9. 7), but that through them other nations might learn God's truth. Show how they failed to live up to their privileges, with the result that disaster overtook them. Their danger was to think that because God had chosen them therefore He would not desert them or punish them (cp. Isa. 28. 15; 47. 8; Jer. 7. 4). The same false pride is found in our Lord's time (Luke 3. 8).

On responsibility, cp. Parables of Talents and Pounds. Show how the principle applies to ourselves. God will judge us by the use we make of our lives and opportunities.

LESSON IV. THE PROPHET AND TRUE RELIGION

WHAT is true religion? Take two passages: (a) John 4. 23, 24; (b) James 1. 27. From these we learn the following truths: (1) True religion must be inward, of the heart and will. Outward observances, correct behaviour in church, not enough; thoughts, motives, imaginations must be right. (2) Sin spoils our religion. There must be inward holiness; we must be "unspotted from the world." (3) True religion shows itself in outward acts of love and kindness—"to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction" (cp. 1 John 3. 17 and 4. 20).

There is always danger that the outward may take the place of the inward; ceremony and observance of true worship; outward respectability of inward goodness.

In upholding true religion, in speaking for God in this matter, the prophets emphasize these points:

(a) *God is One*; there is only one God.

This was not at first clearly understood by the Hebrews; only gradually, and mainly owing to the

prophets, did they grasp it. Up to the time of Amos Jehovah was thought of chiefly as the god of the nation : other nations had their gods. For illustration take these passages : (1) Judges 11. 23, 24. Jephthah is complaining that the Ammonites are invading Israel's territory east of Jordan. He speaks of Chemosh the Ammonite god as if he really existed. (2) 1 Samuel 26. 19. Here David complains that Saul's persecution has driven him outside "the heritage of Jehovah," i.e. outside the land of Israel, where he cannot worship Jehovah, because Jehovah only rules the land of Israel. (3) 2 Kings 5. 17. where Naaman asks that he may take some earth from the land of Israel to his own land, so that he may build an altar to Jehovah on it, thinking that a national god can only be worshipped on his own soil.

We must remember that God's revelation of Himself was gradual, and that the Hebrews were taught by degrees the full truth. The key to the Old Testament is this idea of a gradual and growing revelation.

In contrast to the popular belief the prophets taught that God was One. It will be sufficient to take two prophets, Amos and the Second Isaiah.

Amos throughout teaches that God is the God of the whole universe, Creator and Ruler. He is much more than a national God ; cp. chapters 1 and 2, where he insists that God will punish the other nations for their sin and cruelty.

Second Isaiah (who lived just before the return of the Jews from exile, and whose writings are found in the second half of the book, chapter 40.—end) has as one of his great truths the Oneness of God. Read chapter 45., and see how he emphasizes it. Cp. also chapter 44., which will provide a dramatic criticism of idolatry (*vv.* 12—20). The making of the idol ; the use of part of the wood for a fire and for cooking meat ;

what is left is fashioned into an idol and worshipped. There is nothing more sarcastic in the whole Old Testament. It is sometimes said in defence of idolatry that the idol represents the true God; but the practice of idolatry among the heathen shows that they believe the idol to *be* God. Also wherever there is idolatry there is a belief in many gods. Note how in the Nicene Creed the belief in One God, the Creator of all things, stands first.

It is from the Old Testament that we have derived our belief in One God.

God is Holy. This is the message of all the prophets. The chief blot in all heathen religions is that they picture their gods after their own image. The gods lie, quarrel, lead bad lives. The Bible teaches the holiness of God; and our consciences witness to it. It is because God is holy that He has implanted in us a sense of right and wrong. What the prophets did was to show that morality and religion must go together. Man must be moral if he would serve God aright.

We notice in heathenism that for the most part religion is a mere matter of performing some outward act or ceremony, offering a sacrifice, burning incense, repeating a prayer. It has very little connexion with a moral life. Hence the sense of sin is absent in so much of heathenism. But the Bible puts its emphasis on holiness of life, not on ritual or outward ceremony. Here again it was only gradually that the truth of the holiness of God was learned. The prophets therefore did two things: (a) They taught the true view of God; (b) showed that because God was holy men must be; for man was made in the image of God. God's purpose in creating man was to call into being a society of human beings who should strive after what was right.

Isaiah 6. may be taken as an illustration of this teaching.

Isaiah is the first prophet to bring out the awful holiness of God. When he realizes this he realizes his own sinfulness and unworthiness to be a prophet (cp. Job 42. 5, 6). The vision of God is the measure of our own sinfulness.

Note how often the nation of Israel is spoken of as called to be holy. They were to be consecrated to God's service, and hence must be separated from sin (cp. Exod. 19. 5, 6 ; Deut. 7. 6 and 14. 2).

Emphasize the supreme importance of right living, and of the fight with sin.

(b) *God the Ruler of History.*

This truth follows from the fact of God as One and Creator. If He could create, He can also control. We note in the teaching of the prophets these points :

(1) God was controlling the history of Israel. He had led them out of Egypt, settled them in Canaan, had a purpose for the nation. The prophets were interpreters of the past history of their own people, sought to draw out its lessons, and to show God's care and guidance. We find in Hosea particularly the thought of God's Love watching over the nation (cp. chap. 11.).

(2) God controlled the history of other nations. Note how Amos brings this out—e.g. 9. 7. It is an important part of the message of the two Isaiahs. The first Isaiah, when the Assyrians were threatening Jerusalem, bids Hezekiah take courage, for Assyria is an instrument in God's hands. God controls Assyria as well as Israel (cp. Isa. 37. 21-35). The second Isaiah teaches that Cyrus the Persian king, who, after conquering Babylon, was to let the Israelites return to Palestine, was raised up by God for the very purpose (cp. 44. 28 and 45. 1-7).

(3) God had a redemptive purpose for Israel, and would one day establish a perfect kingdom. He was

ordering history for a redemptive purpose. This will be clearer when the lessons dealing with the Messianic hope have been studied.

Perhaps these points might be made :

(1) Every nation has some purpose to fulfil—something to contribute to God's plan. The Jews ought to have been a missionary nation, but failed. What can England contribute? Should we not, with our wide empire, be a missionary nation?

(2) Nations are judged by God (cp. Amos 1. and 2.). If they fail of their purpose, they perish.

(3) It is not wealth or might that counts with God, but character in a nation.

(4) History is on such a big scale that we cannot always read God's plan. But we see part of it clearly in the history of this one nation, the Jews; and that shows us it is a plan of love and goodness. God controls all history for the bringing in of the perfect kingdom of humanity.

(c) *The Outward and Inward in Religion.*

The notes in Amos have shown how he attacked the religion of his day because it was formal and external only (cp. Isa. 1. 10-23). Here we see what God wants (vv. 16, 17). The contrast is strikingly brought out. All the externals of worship are there. Sacrifices on every altar; crowds of worshippers, the temple thronged; the days of special religious observance (new moon and sabbath) carefully kept; clouds of incense filling the temple. But God says (v. 14) that He can accept none of this worship. Why? Because "your hands are full of blood"—i.e. the worshippers oppress the poor, show cruelty, and even commit murders (v. 21). Their lives show that their religion is a mere form, a cloak which they wear one day and take off the next.

What God requires is repentance, purity of life, a *conduct* that does honour to God. Religion springs from within, is a matter of will and heart. There is no true religion where what is described in verse 23 happens.

Draw a picture of a Harvest Festival to-day, a crowded church, many gifts of fruit and flowers, all join in the hymns. Yet all the while there may have been no real worship "in spirit and in truth"; and when the worshippers go home they may cheat in business, scamp their work, not be above telling a lie, etc.

(d) *The Modernness of the Prophets. Modern Sins.*

The prophets in the name of God condemned social and national sins. As we read them we see how in this matter they have a living message for us to-day. Many of the sins they attacked are with us still, not in precisely the same form, yet in a similar one. Their modernness can be seen if, for example, we take Amos and think of him as speaking to London or one of our great cities to-day instead of to Samaria more than two thousand years ago.

What are some of our modern national sins ?

(1) Drunkenness ; of which we often think lightly—e.g. it is caricatured on the stage. Amos attacks it (6. 6).

(2) Luxury of all kinds. Note luxury, though it is mainly a sin of the rich, can be a poor man's sin. The root of the sin is the desire to "have a good time," to make life an opportunity mainly for enjoyment. It is selfishness. How far has this spirit spread among all classes to-day ? Does work come first, or pleasure ? (cp. Amos 3. 12 and 6. 1-8).

(3) Oppression of poor. The modern forms of this would be underpayment, "sweated" labour, bad housing, etc. Though there has been much improvement

there is still much to be done to enable every man and woman and child to have the opportunity to lead a full, healthy, human life (cp. Amos 5. 11 ; 8. 6).

(4) Perjury. Evidence shows that giving false witness on oath in a law-court is increasing. In Amos' day the difficulty was for the poor to get any justice. The judges took bribes, and the rich offender bought off his judge (5. 12). Our judges are not corrupt, but our witnesses often are. The sin of untruthfulness. Why is lying wrong? God is a God of truth. Also "we are members one of another" (Eph. 4. 25). A lie not only harms ourselves, but injures the society to which we belong.

The prophets witnessed for God's truth which is eternal. The principles of right hold good for all ages and all men. Human nature is the same all the world over. Hence the same sins are always recurring. Therefore the message of the prophets is always fresh.

LESSON V. MESSIANIC PROPHECY: A SPECIAL KIND OF PROPHECY

PICTURE a smaller circle within a larger. The larger is the work of the prophet viewed generally. The smaller is what is known as Messianic prophecy, which may be described as the expectation of a better time in the future, the coming of a perfect kingdom. Here prophecy becomes predictive, looks ahead, describes something which is to be. Note how the religion of the Jews was a forward-looking religion. Its "golden age" was in the future.

To understand Messianic prophecy we must go back to the beginnings of the religion of Israel, for in them is to be found the explanation why the prophets looked forward.

(a) *The Covenant with Abraham* (cp. Gen. 12. 1-3 ; 13. 14-17 ; 15 ; especially 17).

The idea of a covenant lay at the foundation of all the religion of Israel. Note these points: (1) A covenant implies an agreement made between two parties. (2) Obligations on both sides. (3) Certain resulting benefits. (As an example of a covenant between men cp. Gen. 31. 44 ff.)

God chose the Israelite nation to enter into covenant relationship with Himself. This implied: (1) His love for Israel. (2) His faithfulness—He would be true to His share of the covenant. (3) His expectation that Israel would observe its share of the covenant, loyalty to the God who in love had chosen the nation.

Something more was implied, which connects with Messianic prophecy—viz. future blessings. The full meaning of the covenant could only be unfolded gradually. If the nation was true to God it would find out how rich was the covenant, and what blessings God had to give. Note how the covenant with Abraham looks forward—to a seed, a law, a blessing of all nations through him.

The covenant higher than a bargain. It implied a moral relationship between God and man, the love of a father for a son, and in return the son's loyal obedience. Israel through the covenant was to learn what God was, and what sonship meant.

(b) The Covenant with Moses at the Bush.

In Exodus 3. we see a renewal of the covenant, which brings out more clearly how it looked to the future. There was the promise of deliverance from Egypt, and settlement in Canaan (*vv.* 7, 8). There was a further revelation of character of God. "I am that I am" (*v.* 17) would be better translated "I will become what I will become." God (*v.* 15) had been the God of the patriarchs. He had led them and blessed them. This gave ground for a continued trust in Him. Moses was sent to his great work

of forming a nation and starting them on their career with the divine message ringing in his ears: "Trust Me, and you will see what I will become, and what I will do for you." The nation was bidden look forward because it first looked upward. They could go forward into the unknown future confidently; they could go forward expecting new blessings, and expecting that God would more and more reveal Himself. The Old Testament is the record of God's gradual unfolding of Himself and His purposes.

From the very first, therefore, the forward look characterized the religion of the nation.

(c) and (d). God gradually revealing Himself. A religion of hope and expectation.

Examples of gradual growth—the bud, the baby, the dawn. Each looks forward, and you cannot understand any of them until you see the end, what it has become when full-grown. The rose explains the bud, the man the baby, the noon the dawn. This is God's method everywhere. Creation—only gradually was world made; indeed it is being made now. Creation always going on. Only slowly do our minds develop, and our characters form. In human history only slowly is the world growing civilized—the railway displaces the coach, the steamer the sailing ship.

Apply this *(a)* to religion generally—slowly does heathenism die out, and truer ideas of God arise; *(b)* to the Bible. Here you have God's plan of redemption gradually unfolding. The long preparation of the Old Testament. Then Christ's coming to fulfil the past. With Him a new start is made, and Christianity gradually wins its way. What does this teach us about God?

(1) That He is a God of plan and purpose.

(2) That "a thousand years are as one day" with Him.

(3) That He wants men to know about Himself, is leading them on to fuller truth.

(4) That He has made man in His own image, so that he can know Him.

We shall not, therefore, be surprised if we find in parts of the Old Testament an imperfect conception of God, or a moral standard which Christianity condemns. These things were always being outgrown, just as we outgrow our childish ideas.

Impress upon the class these two points :

(a) Religion looks forward, especially the Old Testament.

(b) God is always revealing more and more of Himself to men.

If we would understand God we must expect, be on our watch-tower, see what He had to say to us. We, too, are in covenant relationship with Him (baptism); but He cannot fulfil His part of the covenant, unless we are ready to fulfil ours.

If these general ideas are grasped, the way is ready for a more detailed study of Messianic prophecy.

LESSON VI. LOOKING FORWARD. A MESSIANIC PICTURE

Isaiah II. 1-10

(a) and (b). In the Old Testament we trace the gradual growth of a great redemptive hope, which becomes clearer as time goes on. It will be enough for our present purpose if we mention three stages in the growth of this hope.

(1) We find it dimly foreshadowed in Genesis 3. 15. It is true that here all that is actually said is that there will be a conflict between the seed of the woman and the serpent, and that there is no mention of victory. But we may fairly read it as a promise of victory since God is on the side of right and must win. In the long struggle with

sin, which is the lot of humanity, God is on the side of man when he tries to conquer sin.

(2) The hope becomes much more clear in 2 Samuel 7. 12-16. We note two things: (a) The idea of a kingdom which shall endure becomes prominent; (b) the kingdom is connected with the house of David. Nathan gives David a message from God that his kingdom shall endure for ever.

(3) In the prophets this idea of a king and kingdom is taken up and developed though not all the prophets mention a king. We shall see how very varied were the pictures of the better future which the prophets drew.

The main points to be emphasized are these :

1. God is carrying out a loving purpose of redemption for man.

2. The future contains something better than the present.

3. The better thing which is to come is pictured under the form of a kingdom.

4. This connects with our Lord's teaching about the Kingdom of God. He proclaimed and founded this perfect Kingdom.

Isaiah's picture.

(a) *The coming King.*

He is to be of the house of David, "a shoot out of the stock of Jesse." He is to be full of the Spirit of God, Who will guide and instruct him. (Note that the Bishop's prayer for the candidates in the Confirmation Service is based on Isaiah 11. 2. Could we wish for the candidates anything better than that they should be filled with the same spiritual gifts which Isaiah pictured as belonging to his ideal King?) He will judge justly, not taking bribes, or favouring the rich and powerful. He will be a righteous and faithful ruler, caring for what is right.

(b) *The coming Kingdom.*

It will be a kingdom of peace and love. Even the wild animals will lose their fierceness. "A little child shall lead them." As civilization advances the fiercer animals disappear. The future is with the domesticated animals. In this kingdom all shall know God (v. 9). This is the climax of the picture.

How to interpret this picture.

We are not meant to take every detail literally. The main idea is the important thing, not the picture form in which the idea is clothed. It is a poet's vision. The prophets paint their pictures of the future each in his own colours. They often disagree in details; but they all agree that God will at some future time bring in a perfect kingdom. God was teaching them about the redemptive hope, but He left each prophet free to describe it in his own language.

(c) *The fulfilment of the prophecy.*

Some very important questions are raised here. For an understanding of prophecy we must be clear on these points :

(1) It would be a mistake to suppose that the prophets had a clear idea of Jesus Christ as the coming King. The Person of Jesus Christ did not enter into their visions at all. Prophecy pointed forward to Christ's coming, and we can look back and see how He fulfilled it; but the prophets themselves could not see into the details of the future. Prophecy is not *detailed* prediction of what is coming. What they saw was the vision of a perfect Kingdom and perfect Ruler, but they could only describe it after their own methods.

(2) They did not know when this Kingdom would come. They were sure it would come, but of "the times or seasons"

they were ignorant. Sometimes they feel it is near at hand. If there was a great crisis in the history of the nation, and they were looking for some special act of God, it was natural that they should think of the coming of kingdom almost immediately. At other times they speak as if the coming was far off.

(3) We must take Messianic prophecy as a whole if we would understand it. It is a great movement with many branches. If you take it as whole you find this : (a) A remarkable pointing forward to the future, a prediction of something that God was going to do for men, connected with the coming of a perfect Kingdom and King ; (b) a fulfilment in Jesus Christ. Some of the details of the prophecies are fulfilled in Christ, as we shall see in connexion with Isaiah 53., but we must not lay emphasis on details. We want rather to see how Christ fulfilled the main idea and general spirit of prophecy.

(4) If we study Messianic prophecy as a whole we are forced to admit that God had a plan and purpose. How otherwise can you explain the wonderful agreement in main idea and principle between this forward-looking movement and the coming of Christ centuries after ?

(d) Christ the centre-point of history.

All lines from the past meet in Him. From Him go out new forces which are shaping the present and will shape the future. One day all the lines will be seen to meet in Him when His work is complete (cp. Eph. 1. 10, the summing up of all things in Christ).

Bring out for the class how lines from the past meet in Christ.

(1) The Kingdom described by the prophets. Christ took up the thought of the Kingdom, and made it the centre of His teaching (e.g. Parables of the Kingdom).

(2) The King. Christ a King.

(3) Sacrifice. This was one of the methods by which the Israelites renewed their covenant with God. "Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us."

(4) Knowledge of God. How this gradually grew in the Old Testament. Christ was the complete and perfect revelation of God. The dawn has brightened into noonday.

(5) "I came not to destroy, but to fulfil"—Christ's own word.

(6) All nations have some knowledge of God however dim (Acts 14. 17). This may be viewed as a promise of something better to come. It is all taken up and fulfilled in Christ.

[The teacher may find this study of prophecy difficult at first, but if he will read some of the books recommended he will quickly grasp the main principles of interpretation ; and he will find that no part of the Old Testament is more worthy of study than Messianic prophecy. The various pictures of the future drawn by the prophets give ample opportunity for bright and picturesque teaching.]

COURSE II

LESSON I. THE CALL OF A PROPHET

Isaiah 6

(a) (b) (c). Isaiah tells us when and how God called him to be a prophet. The prophets did not just choose to be prophets of their own free will. They became prophets because they felt the inner call of God in their hearts, and they always regarded themselves as sent and commissioned by God. This gave a high seriousness to their work. They were men with a living sense of God and His nearness.

What Isaiah describes here is a vision which came to him, perhaps when he had gone to the temple to pray. He was a young man, and had doubtless been thinking earnestly about his life's work. What should he do or be? Perhaps he went to the Temple to lay the whole matter before God.

The Vision.

It was a vision of the heavenly temple, and of God seated on His throne, in majesty, attended by His ministers the seraphim, pictured as winged creatures, ready to do Him service. Note these points: (1) The awfulness and majesty of God. The Presence of God made the house rock (*v.* 4). (2) The reverence of the seraphim—two wings folded over the face to hide the eyes from the divine splendour. (3) The holiness of God—the chant of the seraphim. (4) The smoke that filled the house—not incense, but pictures the veil of sin which hides God from man.

The effect on Isaiah (v. 5).

He realizes his own sinfulness, and the sinfulness of the nation. His lips are unclean. Could he be a prophet, speaking for a Holy God with lips which were unclean? The sight of the divine purity made him realize his own sinfulness. Do not we best realize our sinfulness by contrasting ourselves with the sinless and perfect Christ? It is no use comparing ourselves with our neighbours. We want to see ourselves as God sees us.

The forgiveness and the call.

Just when the prophet realized his unfitness came the sacrament of forgiveness and cleansing (v. 6). The glowing coal a symbol of cleansing. Fire cleanses. His lips were touched, the lips he had said were unclean, the lips he would use as a prophet. God was ready to pardon him. Then came the call. The Divine Voice cries, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" Isaiah in the vision heard God asking for messengers, and he answered: "Here am I, send me." He was ready to go now, for he knew God had forgiven him and wanted him. This was perhaps the turning-point in his life. He had probably been long wondering what he should be, considering whether he was not meant to be a prophet. Now it all comes to a head. Isaiah can never have forgotten this wonderful experience; as he never loses sight of the Holiness and Majesty of God. He frequently insists on this in his writings. "The Holy One of Israel" is one of his names for God.

The kind of man a prophet must be.

Isaiah's call shows us the qualities needed in one who was to be a prophet of such a God:

(1) Readiness to go where God should send him; no will of his own.

(2) Readiness to hear God's voice, which might speak at any time, and in various ways.

(3) Consciousness of his own unworthiness, and of sin in his people.

(4) Humility ; it is not his own message he delivers.

(5) A feeling for the people among whom he works : he is one with them, shares their sorrows and joys.

(6) Courage in face of difficulties.

(7) As the root of all, a living sense of God's Presence and Guidance.

(d) Are we called to be prophets ?

If a prophet is one who speaks for God, we can all do that by example and word. God called us all in our baptism to witness for Christ. The youngest child can do this. God certainly calls people to-day to certain work, e.g. the question to those who are to be ordained priests (cp. the service for the Ordering of Priests in the Prayer Book)—“ Do you think in your heart, that you be truly called . . . ? ” He raises up the statesman, the reformer, the preacher for definite pieces of work. Does He call the errand-boy to be an errand-boy, or the lad who drifts into the army to be a soldier ? We cannot, I think, always say that He does, for our choice comes in. But we can serve God in whatever circumstances we are. In that sense He calls us, to be the best errand-boy, the best soldier, etc. Wherever we are we can care for character and God, and serve others. And since we are all different from each other, each of us has a special place to fill in God's plan, which no one else can quite fill.

We are all, as St. Paul says, “ called to be Jesus Christ's ” (Rom. I. 6), “ called to be saints ” (I Cor. I. 2).

The point to bring out is that the prophets were not beings of an entirely different order from ourselves. They

were men called to a very special work at a special time in the history of the world, but the principles which governed them may govern us, and God who helped them can help us. We can all hear God's call in our hearts.

LESSON II. TEACHING BY PICTURES

THE prophets sometimes *acted* the lessons they wanted to teach, or took some natural object and made it a text for their sermon. This arrested attention, and brought home the lesson. If we can *see* a truth with the eye we remember it more easily. We can picture the crowd gathering round the prophet in the street wondering what he was going to do. The parables of our Lord were picture teaching, but they were word-pictures He drew. The prophets went further, acting their teaching, or using actual objects as lessons.

Examples of Teaching by Pictures.

(a) *Jeremiah and the Potters* (chap. 18. 1-12 and 19. 1-13).

The prophet is told to go down to "the potter's house"—i.e. probably south of the valley of Hinnom at Jerusalem where the potters worked. In *The Land and the Book* Dr. Thomson thus describes what he saw at Jaffa, the ancient Joppa.

"There was a potter sitting at his 'frame,' and turning the 'wheel' with his foot. He had a heap of the prepared clay near him, and a pan of water by his side. Taking a lump in his hand, he placed it on the top of his wheel (which revolves horizontally) and smoothed it into a low cone, like the upper end of a sugar-loaf, then thrusting his thumb into the top of it, he opened a hole down through the centre, and this he constantly widened by pressing the edges of the revolving cone between his hands. As it enlarged and became thinner, he gave it whatever shape he pleased with the utmost ease."

We must picture a group of people with the prophet, whom he had taken to see the potter at work. As they watch they see the potter suddenly stop making a vessel, crush the clay again into a lump, and make another vessel out of it. Either there was some flaw in the clay, or the potter had not taken care enough, or something had gone wrong with his work. Whatever it was, the potter does not carry out his original design, and the bowl or cup or water-jar which was begun was never finished.

What lesson were the people to learn? Verses 5-12 tell us. God had absolute power over Israel, as the potter had over the clay, and could crush and destroy them. He could raise up nations and pull them down, for He is the Ruler of the world. Note:

(1) There is a danger of giving a wrong impression of God's character. Though He has power He does not use it arbitrarily and recklessly. God is not a cruel tyrant, delighting in destroying what He has made. He is Love.

(2) Whether He is to destroy Israel or not depends on their conduct. If they repent God will not destroy or punish. But if they do not He must punish; but they have brought the punishment on themselves. This is true of each of us. God wills not that any sinner should perish, and He gives again and again chances of repentance. Our fate depends on ourselves.

(3) Jeremiah had a hard task, for the people were disobedient and would not listen, and were fond of saying that because they were chosen of God, therefore they could do what they liked and God would not desert them. They had forgotten the lesson of Amos 3. 2.

(4) Though repentance was possible Jeremiah felt the case was almost hopeless (cp. 13. 23, where he says that it is as impossible for people so accustomed to evil to change, as it is for the leopard to change his spots or the African

his skin). Hence (chap. 19.) he buys a potter's earthen vessel, and (v. 10) breaks it in pieces before the crowd. It is a picture (v. 11) of the utter ruin and punishment which will come on the nation, because they have forgotten God and worshipped idols and false gods (vv. 4, 13).

Punishment always follows sin. "Be sure your sin will find you out." God, the Holy God, cannot pass sin by unnoticed. Is not the worst punishment this, to become so fond of sin that one cannot repent? The power of habit: the need of breaking evil habits early; sin persisted in must shut us out from God.

(b) *Jeremiah and the Rechabites* (chap. 35.).

It was fourth year of King Jehoiakim (609-597 B.C.). The Babylonian army was in Palestine, and many of the inhabitants had fled for shelter to Jerusalem. Among them were the Rechabites, a wandering tribe descended from the Kenites, and so connected with the brother-in-law of Moses (Judges 1. 16).

Jeremiah is bidden bring them to one of the chambers built on to the Temple and used for store-houses or meetings, and to set wine before them. The Temple was a place of general resort; hence this incident would be widely known in the city, which was what was intended.

The Rechabites refuse to drink, because their ancestor Jonadab had laid a command on them that they were to drink no wine, nor dwell in cities; nor have any settled abode. Who was Jonadab? He helped Jehu overthrow the worship of Baal which under Ahab and Jezebel had displaced the worship of Jehovah (2 Kings 10. 15-28). Why had he given this command? Because he saw the dangers of town-life, luxury, corruption, irreligion. He wished his descendants to live a simple, country life in the fear of God, and for some 200-300 years they had done

so. It was only the fear of the invading army which had driven them for a time into Jerusalem. A late Greek writer tells us that in his day, centuries after, there was a group of people called the Nabathæans living in the very same district, who used no wine, planted no seed, and had no houses.

The application of the scene (*vv.* 12-17).

Jeremiah is bidden leave the chamber and go out to the Temple courts, and address the crowd, which must have been curious to know what the prophet had been doing with these strange visitors to Jerusalem. His sermon is simple. The Rechabites have loyally obeyed the order of their earthly ancestor. The Israelites have refused to obey God. The Rechabites will be rewarded, the Israelites punished.

The following points may be brought out :

(1) The simple life : its value. The duty of a Christian to practise self-control. What are the real values in life ? Money, ease, enjoyment, or knowledge, character and the things of the spirit ?

(2) The prophets (*cp.* Lessons on Amos) constantly attack luxury and the sins of city life.

(3) Temperance and the drink problem.

(4) The Perfect Life of Jesus was the life of One who had hardly any earthly possessions, who "had not where to lay His head." We speak of "my books, money, horses," etc. He used the word "my" differently. "My God, my friends, my meat is to do the will of Him that sent me."

(e) *The good and bad figs* (*chap.* 24).

This was a vision which came to Jeremiah, "the Lord showed me." He would have told the people later what he had seen, and not improbably have had two baskets of figs with him. The vision came (*v.* 1) after some of the

people had been carried away captive by the Babylonians. The destruction of Jerusalem came a little later, and more were made captive. Those who had not been carried away might ask, Why are we left? And they began to argue that they were better than those who had been taken, and so God had spared them. Jeremiah is given this vision to teach the people that the exact opposite is the case. The bad figs were those left behind who had not accepted God's warning contained in the fate of those who had been carried away. They had learned nothing. They were like figs rotten to the core. The good figs are those carried away to Babylon. They will learn their lesson under this discipline, and God has blessings in store for them (v. 6). Stanley in his *Jewish Church* writes: "With the exiles there are indeed some of the choicest spirits of the nation; Ezekiel, and Daniel (Dan. 1. 1) with his three companions."

(a) The good figs (v. 2). Figs are gathered in Palestine in August; but some fig trees have two crops, the first of which is picked in June and is considered a great delicacy.

(b) The bad figs. They were over-ripe and so rotten. Or they may have been the fruit of the sycomore which has a bitter juice.

The teacher will be able to draw out many lessons from the picture of fruit. "By their fruits ye shall know them." Edible fruits and poisonous; sound or with a maggot at the core; "showy" fruit, e.g. berries of deadly nightshade. These illustrations all have application to character. The duty of fruit-bearing. The fruits of the Spirit (Gal. 5. 22, 23). The withered fig tree, which had leaves and no fruit (Mark 11. 12-14).

Note in Jeremiah's vision both kinds of figs were gathered. Their testing time was over. So with the two classes of people. God's punishment had come, for

Jeremiah saw that those left would be carried into captivity. But the results of the punishment would differ for each class. Spiritual pride is fatal. We shall never grow in character if we start by saying we are better than our neighbour (cp. the parable of the Pharisee and the Publican in the Temple, Luke 18. 9-14).

(d) *The Siege of Jerusalem* (Ezek. 4. 1-8).

It is uncertain whether the prophet actually did what these verses describe, or whether he puts into picture-form the thoughts which came to him under the divine teaching. There is no reason why he should not have actually performed some of these actions, though, as we shall see, he could hardly have performed them all. We will assume that he actually did some of them.

(a) *A picture of the siege of Jerusalem.* He takes a brick, still soft, and on it draws something to represent Jerusalem. Then, probably on the earth round the brick, he draws representations of the siege of the city. There was (1) a fort (better "forts") or towers from which the enemy's archers could shoot into the city; (2) a mount, or mound raised to the level of the top of the city walls, so that the besiegers could command the streets of the city; (3) "a camp," which should read "camps" or groups of soldiers; (4) battering rams, heavy wooden beams with iron heads hung by ropes or chains from another beam, which were swung violently against the walls to break them down. He then takes an iron pan or griddle for roasting cakes and sets it up between him and the city to represent an iron wall. This may mean either the strong defences of Jerusalem, or the iron severity of the siege which the city will endure. "Thou shalt lay siege against it" (v. 3). The prophet here represents the besiegers.

But he has also to play the part of the besieged. Here in verse 4 we read of something which the prophet could

not have actually and literally done. He lies first upon his left side for 390 days ; then (*v.* 6) on his right side for 40 days. While he thus lies he is bound down with cords (*v.* 8) so that he cannot move. [Verses 7 and 8 recapitulate verses 1-6. In verse 7 you have the prophet as besieger, in verse 8 as besieged.]

(*b*) *The meaning of the picture.* Various points to be made clear :

(1) Lying on left side bound with cords represents the northern kingdom of Israel bearing its punishment. Samaria the capital of the north, was captured in 722 B.C. by the Assyrians.

(2) Lying bound on the right side represents the southern kingdom of Judah bearing its punishment. Jerusalem was captured and destroyed by the Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar in 586 B.C. in Jeremiah's time.

(3) (*v.* 4). To "lay the iniquity of the house of Israel" upon the left side is a symbol of the heavy punishment which shall be laid upon Israel. When one lies on one's side the side bears the whole weight of the body. The prophet in this way represents how the nation shall bear the punishment of its sins.

[(4) A difficulty arises over the dates. From the captivity of the northern kingdom to the captivity of the southern (722-586 B.C.) was only 136 years. Why does the prophet speak of 390 days=years? Now for the last 40 years of this period of 390 years the two kingdoms were bearing their punishment together. Therefore the whole period of exile is 390 years, not 390 and 40. The punishment of the southern kingdom is 40 years, which is in round numbers the period of the supremacy of Babylon. At the end of that time Babylon fell before Persia, and Cyrus the Persian king gave leave to the Jews to return to Palestine. In the Septuagint

(the Greek translation of the Old Testament) the number in verse 5 is 190, not 390,—and this is probably right. If we take 136 years, the interval between the fall of the two kingdoms, and add on to it 40 years, the period of the exile of the southern kingdom, we get 176 years. To this we may add 12 years, for the Assyrian king, Tiglath-Pileser, carried away many captives from the north 12 years before Samaria fell. That gives 188 years, which is sufficiently accurate, if we remember that the prophet was speaking in round numbers. We may say, then, that the prophet reckoned in round numbers that Israel had been in exile 150 years, and had another 40 years of exile to undergo, and that Judah would be in exile 40 years. Restoration would come for both kingdoms at the same time. (The teacher might with advantage consult the notes on this point in the *Cambridge Bible commentary on Ezekiel*.)]

The meaning of the picture is clear. It stands for God's punishment of the nation's sin. The prophets always viewed the exile as a punishment for national wrongdoing and disloyalty to God. God *must* punish sin for He is a Holy God. The people could not escape, just as the prophet could not move as he lay bound on his side. Yet God was gracious, and would bring the punishment to an end.

It is important to make clear that forgiveness does not just mean being let off the penalty for sin. Sin probably always brings its punishment with it, and the really repentant person will not want to be excused punishment. He will welcome it as a discipline which will help him to do better. Forgiveness is the setting up of a new relation between the sinner and God. Forgiveness faces both ways: (a) To the past—the fact that God forgives removes a burden of guilt from the troubled conscience. It was at the foot of the Cross that Christian in *Pilgrim's*

Progress lost the burden on his back ; (b) to the future. The forgiven sinner says, " God still trusts me, still has work for me to do. I will take new heart and start afresh."

Note on Ezekiel.—He prophesied, not in Palestine, but in the land of exile (i. 1). He was taken captive in 597 with Jehoiachim ; and it was his lot to minister to his fellow-captives, and to cheer them with a message of hope and restoration to Palestine. In picturing the siege of Jerusalem, therefore, he is picturing a past event, and not foretelling a future one. He wants to bring out the lessons of the past. It was an important part of every prophet's work to interpret the meaning of the past and show what moral teaching it contained.

LESSON III. A MISSIONARY PROPHET

Jonah

Note.—In 2 Kings 14. 25 we read of a prophet Jonah son of Amittai who prophesied in the reign of Jeroboam II, about 780 B.C. But the Book of Jonah is considerably later in date than 780, and so was not written by that prophet, nor claims to be so. There may have been a tradition that Jonah son of Amittai went to Nineveh. We do not know. It is far more probable that the book is an allegory, which is the view taken of it in these notes. In this case Jonah is an ideal figure, and not a historical person.

THERE is no more dramatic story in the Bible. The teacher should be thoroughly familiar with its details. The story best divides itself into three :

1. *Jonah's flight.*

Ordered to preach to Nineveh. Refuses, and flees to Joppa, and then takes passage on a ship going to Tarshish at furthest end of the Mediterranean, hoping to put the sea between himself and God. But a storm arises, the ship is in danger. The heathen sailors cry out to their gods to save them and lighten the ship ; but the

storm increases. Jonah asleep in the cabin. Roused by the captain who bids him call upon his God to save them. How could Jonah do this, seeing he was flying from God? Then the sailors gather on deck with the passenger in their midst and cast lots to see if there is any guilty person on board because of whom the storm has come. The lot falls on Jonah. Jonah questioned by the crew. Tells them he is a Hebrew and a worshipper of Jehovah, the Creator of Sea and Land. Further questioning as to why he had fled from God. They ask him what they shall do to him, and Jonah bids them cast him into the sea to appease God's anger. But at first the sailors would not, in their generousness of heart, but tried to row to land. Finally, not liking what they were doing, and with a prayer to God for pardon, they threw him into the sea. The storm ceases, and the sailors (*v.* 16) offer sacrifices to Jonah's God and make vows to Him.

These points should be noted: (*a*) Jonah refused to go to Nineveh because he could not bear to think that the heathen could be saved. In 4. 2 he says that he had a feeling that God meant to be gracious to the heathen. But the Jew hated and despised the heathen. Salvation was for the Jew; the heathen were outside the covenant. Some of the prophets rose to the idea of God's salvation as universal, but the average Jew was exclusive and despised the Gentile.

(*b*) The very heathen, to whom Jonah would not go, are in the persons of the sailors shown in the story in a noble light. They try to save Jonah. They are capable of learning about God; they worship Jonah's God.

(*c*) Jonah's repentance begins on the ship. He finds that he cannot escape God. He owns up, and offers himself as a sacrifice for these heathen sailors. He had learned much on his voyage.

2. Jonah in the Sea.

Did a whale swallow Jonah? We read (i. 17), "And the Lord prepared a great fish (not necessarily a whale) to swallow up Jonah; and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights."

How many jokes have been made about Jonah and the whale! How many refuse to believe the story! It is not to be taken literally. The story is an allegory. The meaning of the allegory is this: Jonah stands for the nation of Israel. Israel received God's truth that it might hand it on to others, but instead it kept it to itself, and refused to be a missionary nation to the Gentiles. For this disobedience to God Israel was sent into exile. The great fish which swallowed Jonah represents the exile which swallowed up the nation. We find in the Bible itself a hint that this is the true explanation. In Jeremiah 51. 34 we read, "Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon hath devoured me . . . he hath swallowed me up like a dragon . . . he hath cast me out." It was evidently a popular way of describing the captivity to liken it to the swallowing of the nation by a monster. In exile the people had time to reflect and repent. When they came back to Palestine, represented by the fish vomiting Jonah out on to dry land, they had still the missionary duty before them. Again, they did not do it, just as we shall see that Jonah, though he did go to Nineveh, went unwillingly and remained at heart a rebel. Chapter 2. marks a further step in Jonah's repentance. If a man had been really swallowed by a fish, could he write a beautiful psalm when in that condition? Note it is not a question whether God *could* work such a miracle; but a question whether He did, whether the story is history, or a poetic allegory. If Jesus could teach by parable, why could not God in Old Testament times? The meaning of the story is the important thing, not the

actual historical truth of the story. This is "an earthly story with a heavenly meaning."

3. *Jonah at Nineveh.*

Jonah (3. 1-3) now obeys and goes to Nineveh and preaches, with the result that the people of Nineveh repent. But Jonah is displeased. He had still not learned his lesson, and in disgust he prays God to take away his life (4. 1-3). God does not argue with him, but merely says, "Doest thou well to be angry?" Jonah now sulks in an arbour he had made outside the city. There he sits watching to see what will happen to the city. He still cannot endure the thought of the heathen receiving the message of salvation. Then comes a beautiful touch in the story. God makes a gourd to grow over the arbour, whose leaves give Jonah shelter from the sun. Jonah gets to love the gourd, when suddenly God makes it wither, and the sun and scorching wind beat on Jonah. Again Jonah asks to die. Once more God says, "Doest thou well to be angry for the gourd?" Jonah is in a temper and says that he does well to be angry. Then God teaches him his lesson. If Jonah cared for and pitied the gourd, a mere vegetable, should not God care for Nineveh with its vast population, all children of God, though in their ignorance they knew it not? The story ends with this vision of the Divine Love watching over the vast city and its ignorant, helpless dwellers.

The application of the story.

This is the one missionary book in the Old Testament, though there are many missionary passages in the Prophets. It comes nearer than any other book of the Old Testament to the Spirit of the Gospel. Salvation is for all. The heathen have a right to know about Christ, and it is our duty to tell them. The tragedy of the Jewish people was that they failed to realize their missionary responsibility,

and kept the truth to themselves. In the early Christian Church there was a hard fight before it was accepted that the Gentiles ought to be freely admitted to the Church, without first having to become Jews. St. Paul was the great apostle of the Gentiles who fought their cause (cp. Acts 15 for the Conference which decided the matter).

Bring out these points :

(a) For Nineveh put China or India or Africa. The ignorant heathen, all objects of God's love and care. Like men groping their way in the twilight, needing light.

(b) The power of Christ to meet the needs of all men. He is the Christ for the Indian and African, as well as for the white man.

(c) God's plan of salvation has to be carried out through men, through us ; otherwise it will not be carried out. We are fellow-workers with God—a high privilege.

(d) Jonah refused to obey. Are we refusing to obey our Lord's last command to go and preach the Gospel in all the world ? What am I doing for Foreign Missions ?

(e) The great need of the heathen, and the great opportunity to-day in almost every country for the spread of the Gospel.

LESSON IV. A SUFFERING PROPHET

Jeremiah

(a) *The sadness of his life.*

“ In misery and continual peril of death, he witnessed the fall of the State and the destruction of Jerusalem—he survived it, but in the silent tomb of an alien land.” It was his lot to prophesy when the kingdom of Judah was going to ruin. He saw the ruin coming, saw that Babylon would destroy the city and carry away captive the nation, did his best to warn and exhort, but to no purpose. What

made his lot so sad was that he loved his country, and loved God. It cut him to the heart to feel that God's love must turn to judgment. We may note these points. He was forbidden to marry (16. 2), and so was solitary, a man with very few friends, having to bear his burden alone. He was by nature shy and timid, and shrank from being a prophet (1. 6). At times he seems to have despaired of life, as no success came to him (15. 10). The leaders of the nation were hostile to him, for he was attacking their folly and sin. They insulted him, and his life was in danger. But he bravely went on to the last. He must have had a tremendous faith in God. No doubt he constantly went back in thought to the promise made him when he was called to be a prophet (1. 18), that he should have strength and stand firm. He was a noble patriot, as is proved by his refusing the offer of the Babylonian commander to take him with him to Babylon, where he would be kindly treated (40. 1-4). He preferred to share the fate of those of his countrymen who were left in Judæa under the newly appointed governor Gedaliah (40. 5, 6). Gedaliah was, however, soon murdered by Ishmael, a prince of royal blood. Jeremiah was probably taken prisoner by Ishmael, but was rescued by Johanan (chaps. 40., 41.). Johanan and his friends decide to fly to Egypt, dreading war and famine in Judah (42. 14). Jeremiah tries in vain to stop them, pointing out that they will suffer in Egypt the very things they dread (40. 16). But they refuse to listen, go to Egypt and compel Jeremiah to go with them (43. 6, 7). Jeremiah died in Egypt, far away from his native land.

Some points for application :

(1) Difficulties in doing work for God. How to overcome them. God never sets us a task beyond our powers.

(2) Loneliness. The difference which friends make.

The value of common work together for God. Christians ought to be one body, giving a common witness.

(3) Love of one's country. Do we really care for England in the best sense? Are we ready to take trouble to make the life of the nation nobler; or do we say, "It is no concern of mine?"

(4) "Dare to be a Daniel, dare to stand alone." Dare to be a Jeremiah. What is the secret of this courage?

(b) *Jeremiah in Prison* (chap. 38.).

The Babylonians were besieging Jerusalem, but hearing that an Egyptian army was coming against them abandoned the siege for a while (37. 1-5). Jeremiah predicts that the Babylonians will return (37. 5-10). The city was short of food, and Jeremiah took the opportunity of the absence of the besiegers to leave the city and visit Anathoth in Benjamin, where he had some land (37. 11, 12). He would naturally want to see whether his property had been damaged, and would also want to get food [*v.* 12, "to separate himself" = "to take his portion," and is best explained as above. For Anathoth, see 1. 1]. His enemies seize him on the pretext that he is deserting to the Babylonians and imprison him, but the king, Zedekiah, has pity on him and removes him to the court of the guard, where the sentries were who guarded the palace [*v.* 21, that is the meaning of "the court of the prison"]. He is given a daily ration of bread. Jeremiah would be able in these better circumstances to go on preaching his message of the return of the Babylonian army and the destruction of Jerusalem. This alarmed the princes, who said he was discouraging the soldiers; and they got leave from Zedekiah, a very weak king, to put him again into the dungeon (38. 1-6).

The dungeon was probably an underground cistern used for storing water. For months in the year Palestine

is without rain, and water has to be stored. It must have been a very deep cistern, for they had to let Jeremiah down with cords into it, and it was horribly dirty with mud, into which Jeremiah sunk.

What were his thoughts? Shall I be left to die; or if they take me out will they kill me? He was ready for either fate. Picture the misery, the darkness, the smell, the clammy cold, growing hunger and discomfort; unable to move or lie down.

Suddenly Jeremiah hears a footstep overhead, then a voice, many footsteps. Is it his enemies come to kill him? No; it is a friendly voice. There was an African [Ethiopia lay south of Egypt] at the court of the king, who had the courage to tell the king he had done wrong in handing Jeremiah over to the princes. He pictures his misery. "You cannot surely let him die of starvation in the dungeon?" The king tells Ebed-melech to rescue him. He gets men and a supply of old rags and clothes and ropes and rescues Jeremiah. The rags were to be put under his armholes to prevent the cords cutting him. Since Jeremiah was sunk in the mud it would need great effort to pull him out (38. 7-13). (It was very difficult to rescue some of our soldiers who fell into deep mud in the war, cp. the difficulty of getting a sheep or pony out of a swamp.)

Think of other people in the Bible who were in prison and how they behaved—St. Paul and Silas (Acts 16. 24, 25); St. John Baptist (Matt. 11. 2, 3 and Mark 6. 27); St. Paul at Rome (Acts 28. 16 to end).

(c) *Jeremiah a type of Christ. The Way of the Cross.*

(1) Jeremiah's sadness over Jerusalem. Christ weeping over the city and predicting its destruction (Luke 19. 41-44).

(2) The men of Anathoth sought Jeremiah's life (11. 21),

and his brethren "dealt treacherously" with him (12. 6). The men of Nazareth, Christ's home, cast Him out (Luke 4. 29).

(3) Jeremiah's loneliness. Jesus was not understood even by the disciples, and at the end "they all forsook him and fled."

(4) Jeremiah was in opposition to the priests and prophets of his day. Jesus was in opposition to Scribes and Pharisees.

(5) It seems to have been quite early that Jeremiah received his call (1. 6, "child" = very young man), and before that living in the community of priests at Anathoth (1. 1) he must from boyhood have received a religious training. Jesus when a Boy in the Temple was conscious of a divine mission (Luke 2. 49).

(6) He was a martyr and prophet whose life was one of suffering and persecution. Jesus was the "Man of Sorrows and acquainted with grief."

The Way of the Cross is Christ's way. Though we may not be called to suffer persecution we must be ready to take up our cross. The Way of the Cross too means service for others, forgetting self. The life of Jeremiah was a long life of service for his fellow-men. And "the Son of Man came, not to be ministered unto, but to minister."

Which is grander—to live for self or others? to grow rich or to serve humanity? Ways in which we can serve our fellows.

(d) *How to bear Suffering.*

A short lesson on suffering will form a natural link between the story of Jeremiah and the lesson which follows on the Suffering Servant.

Three ways of bearing Suffering :

(1) To rebel against it. " Why should I have this pain or trouble, when so-and-so is free from it ? "

(2) To set the lip and bear it grimly and bravely ; like a prisoner being tortured to make him give up a secret, but no sound escapes his lips. The story of the Red Indian chief who to show how he could bear pain let his finger burn away in the fire.

(3) To be drawn by the suffering nearer to God. To be made more sympathetic and loving, to grow softened, like the hard clods broken up by rain.

The Problem of Suffering.

(1) Much of it due to human sin now or in the past. Most of the hospitals could be closed if there were no sin.

(2) But we cannot explain it all in that way. Nor does it explain the apparent injustice of the innocent suffering for the sins of the guilty.

(3) We must fall back on the assurance that God is Love. It is important to correct a false view (or partially false view) of God. People often say, " I must put up with what God sends." But does God *send* suffering ? He *allows* it, but does He cause it ? Jesus often relieved suffering, thereby teaching that it was not God's will that men should suffer. Pain will always be present on earth, but it is our duty to relieve it where we can, and to reduce the amount of suffering.

(4) When we suffer we must not think God does not care. Surely He feels in some way the suffering and sorrows of the world. The Cross—God's Son suffered on it. God, therefore, entered into human suffering to share it. It helps us to know that when we suffer God is near and sharing our suffering. The sympathy of Jesus is

real now, as it was when He was on earth (Heb. 4. 14, 15).

(5) Suffering in the heathen world must be so much sadder than with us, for the heathen know nothing of Christ the great Sufferer nor of His love for suffering men.

LESSON V. A SUFFERING REDEEMER. THE SUFFERING
SERVANT

Isaiah 52. 13-53. end

THIS is read as a lesson on Good Friday. It is not by the Isaiah who lived in Hezekiah's reign when the Assyrians threatened Jerusalem, but by a prophet more than a century after, who lived just on the eve of the return from exile. [Chaps. 40-end with some exceptions belong to this second prophet, whose writings have been grouped with those of Isaiah.]

(a) The Picture of the Suffering Servant.

(1) He was not beautiful to look at—face and form disfigured, marred by suffering (52. 14 ; 53. 2).

(2) Men despised him (do we ever despise or shrink from a deformed or ugly person?). "This cannot be a Redeemer," they said ; "this is some one whom God has afflicted as a punishment."

(3) His face was full of sorrow (53. 3) ; grief written on every line.

(4) Men mocked him and ill-used him, but he bore it all patiently (53. 7), all the insults and suffering.

(5) He suffered a violent and unjust death (53. 8) and his contemporaries did not care. [Verse 8 should be studied in R.V.]

It is the picture of a lonely Sufferer misunderstood, maltreated, sorrowful,

The Meaning of the Picture.

If a teacher would really grasp the meaning of this passage it is essential that he should study it with a good commentary. These notes can only give a point here and there.

(a) Israel was called to be the Servant of the Lord. That is, the nation was chosen for a work of service, to spread the truth, to be a holy nation. There are many "Servant" passages in this prophet which proclaim the privilege and responsibility of Israel—e.g. 44. 1, 2. But Israel as a whole had been unfaithful and had been punished in exile. But there remained a faithful remnant, and to these the prophet spoke, calling them the Servant of the Lord. He encourages them, says their redemption is at hand, and that they will soon return to Palestine. He bids them not forget their high calling.

(b) But though in the first instance Israel, or the faithful remnant, is the Servant, in chapter 53. the prophet draws a picture which points to an *individual* as the Servant. Behind the picture of the nation he sees a single figure of a lonely Sufferer.

(c) Why did this Sufferer suffer? Because he hoped that by suffering he might redeem his people and win them back to God. It will not be easy to explain this to the class; but the following illustrations may help:

What is the best way to win over an enemy? Not by retaliating for the injury done, but by "turning the other cheek," and showing that you still seek his good.

What made the prodigal son come to himself and return home? The thought of his father's patient love which was waiting and longing for him. How often a mother's love has won back a child! The mother is not cross or impatient, only sad; but ready at any moment to welcome the child back.

Has not the picture of Jesus hanging patiently on the

Cross with no word of complaint moved men's hearts, and drawn them to Him ?

This was the method of the Suffering Servant. He hoped by sharing his people's sorrows, and bearing whatever they put on him, to melt their hard hearts and win them over.

They did not at first understand, probably not till he was dead. Then it flashed across some of them, and they said, " Surely he hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows . . . with his stripes we are healed " (53. 4, 5).

This is God's method, the method of Love. How God bears with our sinning ! How He longs to see us repent, and is ready to welcome us back ! How we wound Him by our sins ! His way of redeeming the world was to send His Son to die on the Cross. From the Saviour on the Cross goes out to a careless world this appeal: " Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by ? behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow " (Lam. I. 12).

(b) and (d) *The Fulfilment of the Prophecy.*

The life and death of Jesus Christ were the fulfilment of this prophecy.

(1) Prediction, as we have seen, was not the main work of a prophet, nor are we to look for detailed fulfilment. But here is prediction, and to some extent in detail. (See if the class can trace in detail the likenesses between the Servant and Christ.) But we must not suppose that the prophet foresaw the Figure of Christ. He was taught by God to draw his marvellous picture of a Suffering Redeemer, but he did not know when the Redeemer would come, or who he would be, or exactly how the prophecy would be fulfilled. We looking back can see, as he could not, how Christ fulfilled it.

(2) It is certain, I think, that Jesus Christ had studied this passage. He knew His Old Testament well, and often

quotes from it. It must have helped Him to make clear to Himself His own mission. He was come to be a Servant, not only of His own nation, but of all men. And His life was one long act of service. He had come to redeem men from sin by conquering it in His own life, and by giving Himself as a sacrifice for sin. It was the sins of his nation that moved the Suffering Servant of our prophet to sacrifice himself for his people.

(3) The result of the Cross has been that men have been in every age and race drawn to Christ, and have through His help conquered sin. He is a Redeemer = One who buys back men out of slavery. Thus the prophet's words in 53. 11 are fulfilled.

(4) Has Christ added anything to this old prophecy, or has He only fulfilled it? The last word of the Old Testament about sin and suffering is in this prophecy. But something is missing which the Old Testament supplies. The prophet thought of his redeemer as a man. In Christ we see that God Himself redeems. What the New Testament adds is this, that God in love for men comes Himself in the Person of His Son, and shares human life, bears its sorrows and sins and burdens. Could love do more? If that does not move us, what will?

Try to get the class to realize two things :

(1). Our sin now wounds and hurts God. When we sin we shoot an arrow into God's heart.

(2). Christ died for us. That does not mean we have nothing to do. We have everything to do. We have to die to sin, and take up our cross, and reproduce Christ's life and spirit in ourselves. This is to be a "member of Christ." "A death unto sin and a new birth unto righteousness."

We cannot do it by ourselves. But Christ is alive and can do in us what we cannot do unaided.

(c) *The Suffering Servant and the Messianic Hope.*

The teacher will connect this prophecy with Lessons V and VI in Course I, and with Lesson VI in Course II which follows. It should be the teacher's aim to give the class some idea of Messianic prophecy as a whole, showing how it developed, how new elements came into it as the light grew clearer, how it was all moving forward towards its fulfilment in Christ.

(1) Bring out the differences in the various pictures of the future drawn by the prophets, e.g. contrast Isaiah 11. 1-10 (Lesson VI, Course I) with the picture of the Servant. In the one you have a King, in the other a despised Sufferer. The King rules righteously and puts down evil, but the sense of sin is much deeper in the Servant passage. In Isaiah 11. there is nothing about the need of redemption from sin. The King is a servant of his people in that he cares for their good, but the Servant serves in a much deeper sense, for he shares the sorrows of his people, and gives his life for them. The whole idea of the coming Redeemer has grown in meaning.

(2) Christ fulfils both prophecies. He is a King, but wore a crown of thorns. On earth He was a Servant. One day He will "take his power and reign." Show how both pictures led up to Christ.

This lesson provides an opportunity for revision and for testing what grasp the class has of Messianic prophecy.

LESSON VI. CHRIST THE FULFILLER

REFERENCE to this has been made in Course I, 6. This section takes up and expands what is there said.

(a) *Partial and complete truth.*

The teacher should try to show how in Christ who said "I am the Truth" (John 14. 6) is to be found the

fulfilment of the earlier prophecies after truth, or the earlier partial revelations of truth which God gave.

Illustrate the difference between partial and complete truth. Every child knows something about a primrose = partial truth. The botanist knows, not all about it, for we do not know all about anything, but all that there is to be known at present = complete truth. At early dawn there is some light, but things are not clear. At noon there is full light, and things are clear. God only taught the world gradually. In Christ He gave the complete revelation of His character.

Take the case of a heathen sacrificing to his god. He knows some truth, e.g. that there is a power higher than himself on whom he is dependent. But he mixes up his knowledge with false beliefs, and he knows very little about God. He has partial truth. When he learns about Christ he reaches fuller truth. The heathen believes that when a man dies his spirit does not die, but he knows nothing about the Christian hope of a future life. In Christ he finds the fulfilment of his partial truth about immortality.

We may see, therefore, in these dim beliefs of heathen religion a prophecy or promise of something better to come; partial truth looking forward to the day when it shall be changed into complete truth. The lines all meet in Christ. He fulfils the earlier hopes and aspirations of mankind.

It is important to get the class to see that Christ stands in close relation to the past, that there was preparation for His coming, especially of course in the Old Testament, and in the history of the Jews. Bring out the thought of a great Divine plan slowly unfolding.

In Christ's fulfilment of the past there are two sides: (a) He fulfils or completes what was true; (b) He rejects or destroys what was false. When you have reached *the*

truth you can see what was false in your earlier beliefs.

(b) *Sacrifices and the Cross.*

Sacrifice has played an important part in all religions, and a very prominent one in the religion of the Old Testament. What is the relation of the idea of sacrifice to Christ? Did He fulfil it, or did He do away with it?

(a) *The meaning of Sacrifice.* We may distinguish several ideas in connexion with the offering of sacrifices. A sacrifice is an offering (an animal or fruits of the earth) made by the worshipper to his god to bring him into closer relation with the god. Among primitive men each tribe had its own god, and the original idea of sacrifice was the sharing of a common meal by the god and his worshippers. The god was supposed to be of one kin with the tribe, and by eating with the tribe would be bound closer to them, would protect them against hostile tribes, and generally care for their interests. This is the earliest notion of sacrifice.

Then later another idea arose of making a gift, as costly as possible, to the god to win his favours. Human sacrifices were made because a man could offer nothing more costly than his first-born son (cp. Abraham and Isaac); or Jephthah and his only daughter (Judges 11. 34 ff.). From this second idea arose the notion of an atoning sacrifice for sin, something which may remove from the worshipper his guilt before the god whom he has offended.

The three main ideas, therefore, in sacrifice are: (1) Sharing a common meal. (2) A gift to God. (3) An atoning gift for sin, to bring the worshipper back into favour with God. (Atonement = at-one-ment.)

(b) *Jewish Sacrifices.* These were a central part of the religion of Israel. They consisted of:

(1). *The Peace Offering*, which was a Thank Offering.

This would be offered on any occasion of rejoicing, e.g. a victory (1 Sam. 11. 15), or the accession of a king (1 Kings 1. 19). The idea underlying it would be partly a gift of thanksgiving to God, partly the older notion of God sharing in a common meal with the worshippers.

(2). *The Burnt Offering*. This was the best gift, the most costly, which the worshipper could offer. It might be a bullock, sheep, goat—a male without blemish, or a turtle-dove or young pigeon. It represented the complete surrender or devotion of the worshipper to God.

(3). *The Sin Offering and the Guilt Offering*. Where some offence had been committed by the nation or an individual against God these offerings were made as an atonement, in order to restore again the broken relation between God and the worshipper. (But the offering was made only for unintentional offences.)

(4). *The Day of Atonement* (Lev. 16). Once a year the high priest made atonement for the sins of the whole nation, so that the nation might make a fresh start and dedicate itself anew to God.

[The whole subject of the Jewish sacrifices is complicated, and scholars differ in their views. The class need not be troubled with details; but it is as well to give them an outline of Jewish practice, that they may realize what a great part sacrifice played in the religion of the Old Testament.]

(c) *The Sacrifice of Christ*. On the Cross Jesus Christ offered Himself as a sacrifice for the sins of the whole world. He offered the perfect *obedience*. He completely surrendered His will to God.

“Not my will, but thine be done.” He offered *the most costly gift* possible—Himself, His life. He made “at-one-ment,” *restoring man to fellowship with God*. God and man—there was a barrier between them due to sin. That barrier Christ removed, and because of what Christ

has done God is ready in His love to pardon and accept us.

No more burnt offerings, no goats or bullocks are now needed. The long line of Jewish sacrifices came to an end with Christ. After all, they could not take away sin (Heb. 10. 1-18).

Is there any need of sacrifice at all now? Yes.

(1) The sacrifice of ourselves in loyal obedience to God; our hearts and wills. "Here we offer and present unto thee, O Lord, ourselves, our souls and bodies, to be a reasonable, holy, and lively sacrifice unto thee" (Prayer of Oblation or Offering in Communion Service).

(2) The sacrifice of our money. To give to God is our duty. Gifts at Harvest Service.

(3) The sacrifice of the lower for the higher. In the Christian life there must always be the "giving up."

(4) We must die with Christ—die to sin. We must try to live in the spirit of what He did for us on the Cross.

The main aim of the teacher in this lesson should be (1) to give the class some idea of the meaning of sacrifice; (2) to show how the Old Testament prepared the way for Christ through the notion of sacrifices; (3) to show how the sacrifice of Christ differed from the old Jewish sacrifices.

(c) *King and Priest.*

(a) *The Coming King.* See Course I, 6, where in connexion with Isaiah 11. 1-10 the hope of the coming King is studied. Compare other pictures of the King, e.g. Jeremiah 23. 3-6, and Micah 5. 2. Also Zechariah 9. 9 (cp. Matt. 21. 4, 5).

Not all the prophets have this vision of the King, and those who have describe him each in their own way. But there was this distinct expectation.

The hope fulfilled in Christ. In what sense was He a King?

(1) Not an earthly king—"My kingdom is not of this world." The title on the Cross—was it a correct inscription?

(2) "Thy kingdom come"—explained by the next clause in the Lord's Prayer. Christ's empire is the human heart. The citizens of His kingdom are those who keep His rule of life.

(3) The name given Him in Revelation 19. 16, "King of Kings and Lord of Lords." Why has He this title? He rules the nations, makes war on evil, guides the course of history. His own word (Matt. 28. 18), "All authority hath been given unto me in heaven and on earth" (cp. the whole passage Rev. 19. 11-16). By His Resurrection and Ascension He proved Himself King.

Bring home the thought of the Living Christ, ruling now, wanting to see His kingdom grow throughout the world, coming one day as the King-Judge to judge the world.

Illustrate by the parable of Judgment in Matthew 25. 31 to end.

(b) *The Coming Priest.* The duties of a priest in Israel : (1) To teach people about God. He stood in special relation to God. The special tribe of Levi provided the hereditary priests. (2) To burn incense and prepare the shew-bread—the ceremonial side of religion was under his care. (3) To offer sacrifice on their behalf (cp. especially the High Priest on the day of Atonement).

What a responsibility rested on the priest in thus acting for people! The truer he was as a priest the less would he think of himself, the more would he think of the people, sharing their interests, and identifying himself with them.

Compare our ideal of a parish priest to-day.

Did the prophets look forward to the coming of a Great Priest of the nation? Yes; but the pictures are not so

clear as in the case of those of the King. This is perhaps truer of the earlier prophets. There was often opposition between priests and prophets (e.g. Amos and Amaziah), for the prophets saw the danger that the ceremonial which the priests carried out might make the people think more of the outward in religion than the inward. After the exile the priests were the chief power in the restored community (cp. Books of Ezra and Nehemiah), and it is in the Prophets of about that date that the figure of the priest is prominent. Ezekiel 40-end (he wrote during the exile) gives a detailed account of the worship and priesthood of the restored nation. It is his picture of what he hopes may come about. In Haggai we see the important part played by the priest. For a picture of the Priest-King see Zechariah 6. 9-15. But the best picture of the real meaning of priesthood is the Suffering Servant—Course II, 5. Here the Servant completely identifies himself with the people, suffers for them, and gives his life as a sacrifice for them. Servant and Priest—the two meet in this picture of the Suffering Redeemer.

The Priesthood of Jesus Christ. This is the theme of Hebrews 3-11.

The writer wants to show that the Priesthood of Christ is a very real thing; that it was foreshadowed in the Old Testament, but that it is different from Old Testament priesthood.

The points emphasized are these :

(a) We have a great High Priest—Jesus Christ (Heb. 3. 1; 8. 1).

(b) He sympathizes with us, feels for us His people (4. 14-16).

(c) He has offered once for all the Perfect Sacrifice of Himself for sin. Hence there is no further need of the old sacrifice of slain animals (10. 11, 12; 7. 27; 9. 24-26).

(d) He offered this voluntarily, whereas the slain beasts were not willing victims (cp. John 10. 18).

(e) He makes intercession for us—pleads with God for us. It is as if God, looking on what Christ has done for men, is ready because of that to pardon and restore us.

Bring out the meaning of Christ's priesthood for ourselves. His sympathy with us—we can turn to Him knowing He cares and hears (5. 2). We may "draw near with boldness unto the throne of grace" (4. 16) because of what Christ is and has done for us. He has power to save us (7. 25) if we yield ourselves to Him.

A teacher might draw a picture for the class of a high-priest in Israel sacrificing a slain animal and sprinkling the blood on the mercy-seat (Lev. 16) and then question as to what good that does? Yet it stands for something; shows there is a need in man for forgiveness and cleansing. Then by contrast bring out the meaning of Christ's sacrifice and present Priesthood. Christ and ourselves—we must not think of Him as apart from us. He is the Head, we the Body. We can share His life of service, and be baptized with His Spirit. Unless we do share His life, His priesthood is an external thing, which has really no meaning for us.

What is said of Christ in Hebrews gives us the ideal, the true meaning of priesthood.

(d) *The Old Testament leading up to Christ.*

Course I, 6 has dealt with this. A brief summary of the main points will suffice.

(1) Emphasize that God has a plan for the world. One nation selected, and gradually taught and trained.

(2) The training gradual. The teaching given as the people could bear it. This explains why there are things in the Old Testament which offend our Christian sense of

morality. Christ has set a higher standard. In these early days they had not such a full knowledge of God.

(3) In the prophets you find the Messianic hope unfolding—a looking forward to the coming of a Perfect King and perfect Kingdom.

(4) What underlies this is the conviction that God was working out a great redemptive purpose for the world.

(5) Christ fulfilled this earlier hope. We looking back can see how the whole movement pointed forward to Him. The prophets could not see this so clearly. But they were sure that a better time was coming and that God had some rich redemptive blessing in store for His people.

COURSE III

LESSON I. ISAIAH AND HIS CALL

(See Course II, I)

(a) *Why Isaiah shrank.*

Verse 5 gives the reason. The vision of God's holiness was the measure of his own sinfulness. Why are the lips emphasized? Because the prophet is one who speaks for God. His sinfulness came to a point, as it were, on his lips. Why does he refer to the unclean lips of the people? Is he thinking of their worship in contrast with the worship and praise of the seraphim (*v.* 3)? Sir G. Adam Smith puts it thus in his commentary on Isaiah: "Their social and political sin—sin of heart and home and market—came to a head in their worship, and what should have been the blossom of their life fell to the ground like a rotten leaf beneath the stainless beauty of the seraphs' praise."

Points: (1) Any who would work for God must be very humble about themselves, must recognize their unfitness for so great a task. (2) The reality of sin. We must not compare ourselves with our neighbours, but with Jesus Christ, the Sinless One. (3) A man's work for God may be spoiled by conceit, want of seriousness, or some sin he clings to. (4) The holiness of God. How this was brought home to Isaiah by the vision. We may best know what God is by studying Jesus Christ.

(b) *Why he responded to the call.*

Because God met his sense of his unfitness by forgiveness. The picture of the seraph flying with the glowing

coal and touching his lips. Fire cleanses. The unclean lips were cleansed. The effect on Isaiah was to make him feel that God wanted him, despite his unworthiness, and would pardon him and accept him. He wins new hope and courage. He feels he can make a new start.

This lesson gives great opportunity for explaining what forgiveness is : (1) Human forgiveness. When you forgive someone you "make it up," and are ready to be friends again. It is not forgiveness to say, "I will forgive, but I won't have anything more to do with you." If we really forgive a person we are ready to receive him back into loving relationship. The past is blotted out, the future is full of promise. (2) God's forgiveness is of the same kind. He welcomes us back, and gives us new hope and encouragement (cp. the Prodigal Son welcomed by the father).

Isaiah also responded because he was sure that God would not change, and that if he sinned after he had become a prophet, he could still turn again and be forgiven. God is always ready to pardon, if He sees in us true repentance. The danger is that, because we know this, we shall put off the day of repentance. "I can repent any time." Can you? The power of habit. How much time is left you? You do not know. The meanness of offering to God the end of a life, after having lived all his best years for self (Eccles. 12. 1).

(c) *God's need of messengers.*

The Divine voice sounds (v. 8), "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" The question was not addressed to Isaiah alone. It represents what God is always saying in every generation, to all men. Isaiah answered it, but there were many in Israel who might have answered it. Why does God need messengers? Because He cannot do His work without us. God works through men.

Illustrations. Terrible diseases in China or India. God wants them cured. They cannot be unless we send out doctors and nurses, and teach the people the laws of health. God wants the heathen to know about Christ. How can they, unless we will tell them ?

We learn (1) that we are to be fellow-workers with God. A great responsibility and privilege. We should be proud if the King called us to do a bit of work for him.

(2) God is saddened if men refuse to work for Him. If we refuse, we hurt God, and fail to fulfil our purpose for which He made us.

(3) God's work is delayed and hindered, if we refuse. It is a tremendous thought that we can hinder God's work, but it is true.

How can we be God's messengers ? In quiet little ways we can help—by kindness, obedience, by our influence. If we are faithful in little things God will give us greater things to do for Him.

Isaiah must have been faithful in little things before he became a prophet. We call them "little things." Are they so in God's sight ? Are they not great things ? Is there any great or small with God ?

The need of messengers pressing to-day. So much to be done—the great missionary opportunity ; all the work of restoration after the war. God calling loudly for messengers. Are we listening and obeying ?

(d) "*A man sent from God.*"

The description of St. John Baptist (John 1. 6)—but is true of all the prophets. What it means.

(1) Isaiah (or any prophet) did not make himself God's messenger. God chose him, and called him ; though he of course answered the call.

(2) The fact that God called him was a pledge that God

would be with him in all his work. God does not call a man and then leave him without help.

(3) Isaiah therefore knew that in all his difficulties he could receive help. A spring which always flows. You can go each day with your can and fill it.

(4) All the prophets were conscious that they were sent by God. This made them feel the importance and seriousness of their work. It was a trust. If we could view our work—even minding a horse or sweeping a room—as a piece of work for God, how much better we should do it.

(5) How to receive help from God, how to feel we are being sent by Him. If we pray about our work we shall know God is with us as we do it.

LESSON II. ISAAH AND THE ASSYRIANS (chaps. 36. 37).

(a) *Outside the city* (chap. 36.).

Picture the advance of the Assyrian armies. The greatest military power. Nothing could stand against them (cp. the Germans sweeping through Belgium). In Isaiah 5. 26-30 you get a striking prophecy of the terror they would cause. As they drew nearer to Jerusalem how the terror would spread. Fugitives from the north coming in for shelter with terrible tales of their might and cruelty.

They reach Jerusalem and camp round it. Chapter 36. shows us the Assyrians threatening the city. But before they attack it, the Assyrian officer makes an offer. [Rabshakeh is a title, not a proper name. It signifies a military officer of high rank, who acted as negotiator for the King of Assyria.] King Hezekiah sends out men to him to hear the terms he proposes. The meeting takes place by the reservoir which supplied the city with water (*v.* 2). Hezekiah sends out three men (*v.* 3).

Note these points in the Assyrian officer's speech :

(1) If Hezekiah is relying on help from Egypt, it is useless (*v.* 6).

(2) If he trusts in God, then let him know that God has sent the Assyrians (*v.* 10). And (a clever hit !) has not Hezekiah removed the high places and altars of God from the land, bidding men worship only at Jerusalem (*v.* 7) ? Was not God displeased at this, and so sent the Assyrians ?

[In 2 Kings 18. 4 we read how Hezekiah did remove the high places, because false worship was offered on them. He wanted to purify religion, to restore the true worship of Jehovah.]

(3) Then the officer speaks to the people on the wall of the city, who were anxiously watching what was going on. Cannot we picture their fear and excitement ? Hezekiah's men ask him to speak in Syrian, so that the people may not understand. He scornfully rejects their suggestion (*vv.* 11, 12). He offers the people peace and plenty if they will surrender and come with him to Assyria (*vv.* 16, 17), and reminds them that none of the gods of the nations have been able to save them, and that Hezekiah's God cannot save them (*vv.* 18-20).

There must have been many faint hearts who would have liked to surrender. But Hezekiah had told the people on the wall to make no reply (*v.* 21), and they received the Assyrian's challenge in silence.

The teacher has ample opportunity here for a dramatic and interesting lesson.

These practical applications can be made : (1) Fair-weather religion : will it stand the storm ? Is our religion going to help us in trouble ? Or do we trust God only when all goes well with us ? See how St. Paul's religion helped him (Acts 16. 23-25) ; or the case of Daniel, or the three men in the fiery furnace (Dan. 3. and 6.).

(2) Might and Right. The Assyrians had might. Evil often has might; yet in the long run right must win, because God is on the side of right: "If God be for us, who can be against us?"

We must be cautious how we say, "God is on my side." The more important question is, "Am I on God's side?" If I am, if I am really on the side of right, then I need not fear any enemy. "One with God is a majority."

(b) *Inside the city* (chap. 37. 1-8).

Historical Note. The great rival of Assyria was Egypt. Palestine lay between the two, and hence frequently suffered in their wars. Sennacherib was the Assyrian king at this time. He came to the throne 705 B.C. In the second year of his reign (704) a new king, Tirhakah, succeeded to the crown of the Ethiopian kingdom of Napata, a vigorous monarch, who soon extended his power over all Egypt. He adopted the policy of stirring up the states of Palestine against Assyria, whose vassals they were. He sent an embassy to King Hezekiah somewhere between 704-701. This is referred to in Isaiah 18. 1, 2. Against the advice of Isaiah Hezekiah makes an alliance with Tirhakah, and decides to rebel against Assyria. Isaiah wished Judah to avoid these political entanglements. His advice was, "Trust God; He will protect Jerusalem." Sennacherib had other enemies to deal with first before he could pay attention to Judah. When he was free he marched into Palestine.

There is a difficulty to be met. We have two accounts of the campaign. An inscription has been found which gives Sennacherib's version. It tells how he took forty-six cities in Palestine, and how "Hezekiah himself was overwhelmed by the fear of the brightness of my lordship; the Arabians and his other faithful warriors whom as a defence for Jerusalem his royal city he had brought in,

fell into fear. With thirty talents of gold and eight hundred talents of silver, precious stones . . . a heavy treasure, and his daughters, his women of the palace, his young men and young women, to Nineveh the city of my lordship, I caused to be brought after me, and he sent his ambassadors to give tribute and to pay homage." The inscription says that Hezekiah surrendered as a result of the siege of Jerusalem—"himself I shut up like a caged bird in Jerusalem his royal city."

The other account is in 2 Kings 18. 13-19. 37. While this agrees remarkably with the inscription in many points, it differs in this important point. It makes Hezekiah surrender *before* the city was besieged. The probable explanation is that there was a siege of Jerusalem, but it was not pressed, for Hezekiah surrendered. Thus 2 Kings 18. 13-16 is the Hebrew writer's equivalent for the inscription, the events being briefly recorded in Isaiah 36. 1.

Hezekiah then paid tribute, and for the moment the Assyrians went away. But they returned, and their second advance against Jerusalem is what is recorded in Isaiah 36. 2-end and 37. (=2 Kings 18. 17-19. end). Sennacherib may well have felt that in his campaign against Tirhakah it would be unwise to leave in his rear a strong city like Jerusalem, and so decided to exact a full and complete surrender.

One other difficulty may be mentioned. The narrative in Isaiah seems to record two attempts by Sennacherib to make Jerusalem surrender: (a) By a display of force (36.-37. 8); (b) by a letter sent to Hezekiah (37. 9-38.). Would he have thought that a letter would succeed when Hezekiah knew that Egyptian help was coming? (v. 9). The arguments used in the letter are the same as those in the Rabshakeh's speech. It may be, therefore, that we have a double narrative of the same incident.

What was happening inside the city.

Picture the return of the messenger (36. 22) ; the people crowding to the gate to hear the news. "Bad news," they cry. "See, their clothes are rent," a sign of grief. The messengers tell the king (37. 1). He rends his clothes, and puts on sackcloth.

What were Hezekiah's thoughts and feelings? He felt how foolish he had been to trust to Egypt and not to God, as Isaiah advised. Here was the enemy at the gate ; how could he hope to resist? What would his people think of him, who had led them into this plight? But in his trouble he does two wise things. He takes his difficulty to God (v. 1) ; and he sends to Isaiah asking him to pray for the city.

(a) Hezekiah in the temple praying ; for pardon and deliverance. He was not a bad king, wanted to serve God, but rather a weak one ; had not quite the faith to trust Isaiah's advice. Where should we take our troubles? However foolish we have been in the past God will always hear us and pardon, though we cannot expect that He will always deliver us from the consequences of our folly. But in this case Jerusalem was saved, as we shall see.

(b) Hezekiah sends messengers to Isaiah, turns to the man whose advice he had neglected. Better do that than be too proud to own our mistake. Begs Isaiah to pray for the city (37. 2-5).

Assuming that the two narratives referred to above are two versions of the same incident, we have some account of Hezekiah's prayer in the temple (15-20).

1. He acknowledges God's power—He is the only God.
2. He points out how Sennacherib has "reproached the living God." The insolent Assyrian mocks at God.
3. He admits the great might of Assyria and sees that only God can save Jerusalem.

4. He prays for deliverance, so that all may know God is God alone.

Trouble often drives men to God; but that man will find God the most help in trouble who has sought His help in time of prosperity and happiness. Religion not only for trouble, but for all life.

(c) *Isaiah's message* (37. 6, 7 and 21-35).

Let not Hezekiah be afraid. All will be well. God will "put a spirit in him," i.e. a spirit of fear or panic shall seize Sennacherib. A rumour or report will reach him and cause him to return to his own land, and there he will perish by the sword.

What was the rumour? The report that Tirhakah was advancing against him from the south (v. 9).

A little later (v. 21) Isaiah seems to have sent another message to the king, which was the answer to his prayer. Some of the points in this will come out later. Meanwhile we may note these points: (a) The message was from God (v. 21), and the power by which the deliverance was to come was God's (v. 32); (b) Jerusalem would be safe; it would not be attacked (v. 33); (c) Sennacherib did not know whom he was blaspheming. "The Holy One of Israel" was greater than all the Assyrian armies (v. 33).

Note how the prophet at this crisis takes command, as it were. While the others were terrified, he was calm and confident. You see the prophet here as a statesman, an adviser to the king.

Other examples of a religious man being calm in danger and taking the lead—e.g. St. Paul in the shipwreck (Acts 27. 9-11; 21-25; 31-36), or Nehemiah.

Can we train ourselves to meet danger? Natural courage—here not all alike. But we can to a great extent learn to be brave. Isaiah must have had natural courage,

but to that he added the courage which an absolute trust in God gives.

The relief this message must have been to the king and people. How they would get new hearts and new hope ! Many must have reproached themselves with not listening to Isaiah in days past. Never were his faith and influence greater than at this moment. He must have felt that now he had a better chance than ever before of preaching to an attentive audience. We may be sure he used this opportunity to speak about God and the need for repentance. Here was, indeed, " a man sent from God."

(d) *God rules history* (37. 21-29).

(Cp. Course I, 4). Isaiah's message, given in the form of an address to the Assyrians, is that Sennacherib is an instrument in God's hands (*v.* 26). God had raised up the Assyrians for His own purposes. They were under His control. This mighty power which seemed resistless was there to do God's bidding. He let the Assyrians come to Jerusalem. He would not let them take it.

God noted their pride and insolence, their defiance of God and man (*v.* 28). He would show them that they were not independent of Him. Isaiah likens Assyria to a wild, raging monster (*v.* 29). Men put a hook in its nose and bridle it to control it. In the same way God will bridle Assyria and turn them back to their own land.

For Isaiah God rules all history. This was in many ways a new thought for that age.

Isaiah (though Amos, too, taught the same) did perhaps more than any other prophet to widen and deepen men's thought of God.

We learn : (1) That in God's plan every nation has a place. Each has something to contribute to the working out of the plan. What is England's place in God's plan ? What can England specially do for God ? (2) That however

strong the power of evil seems to be, God is stronger. God rules ; God must win in the end. (3) The greatness of God. What must God be in power and majesty if He rules all. Yet Jesus Christ told us His power was a power of Love. His name is " Father."

LESSON III. THE RESCUE OF JERUSALEM (chap. 37).

(a) *Why was Isaiah confident ?*

Appearances were all against him. Who could imagine that Jerusalem could resist such a power ? But the prophet did not judge by appearances. He went deeper. As we study his writings we see that the foundation truth on which he built was that the ultimate power in the universe was Righteousness—" the Holy One of Israel." This meant for him these things :

(1). Righteousness—the right—must win. If Assyria were to win it would mean that an evil power would be supreme.

(2). God was working out a purpose through Israel. They were a chosen people. God would not allow His purpose to be defeated. This did not mean that Israel was God's favourite ; and that whatever the nation did all would be well. Isaiah saw in Assyria an instrument of chastisement and punishment for Israel's sin. But he looked beyond the punishment to a time when Israel should come out of the fire purified and ennobled. He speaks of " a remnant " who shall be saved. From that remnant a new Israel would arise.

The real source of Isaiah's confidence lay in his knowledge of God. For years he had been studying God's mind and character. By prayer, meditation, study of God's dealings with the nation in the past he had become sure that God could be utterly trusted. It was this trust in

God and His purposes he wished to see made real in Hezekiah and the nation.

Isaiah could not have thus known God if he had not tried to know Him. To know God needs effort. So many think they can know God without taking any trouble about it. You cannot really know your friend unless you take trouble. You must enter into his mind, share his interests, and be unselfish in your friendship.

What must we do to know God? (1) Share His interests; seek the things He wants.

(2) "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."

(3) Prayer. Talk to God in prayer, and listen for His answer.

(4) Read about His purposes in the Bible.

What will the result be? That when trouble comes to ourselves or our nation we shall be calm and confident, because we shall know God (not know *about* Him), and shall know He can be trusted.

(b) *The destruction of the Assyrians* (chap. 37. 36).

What happened? Almost certainly a pestilence destroyed the army. The verse reads as if this disaster took place just outside the walls of Jerusalem, but the Assyrians, frightened at the news that Tirhakah of Egypt was advancing to help Hezekiah, had withdrawn from Jerusalem and gone south to meet Tirhakah (*vv.* 8, 9). The disaster, therefore, occurred when the Assyrians were in Egypt. This is born out by an old tradition current in Egypt, and mentioned by the Greek historian Herodotus, that the Assyrians had reached Pelusium in the marshes of the Nile, when a plague of mice attacked the army, eating their bow-strings and shield-straps, so that their weapons were useless. Among the Egyptians the mouse was the symbol of pestilence. The story of the mice is a

picture-way of saying that a plague broke out. These marshes were notoriously unhealthy. The Crusaders suffered there. "A Persian army was decimated here in the middle of the fourth century before Christ." The army would have been exhausted and probably short of food. Hence it was an easy prey to sickness.

Picture the relief to Jerusalem. The Assyrians had withdrawn, but they might come back, indeed were sure to, when they had defeated Tirhakah. What rejoicing in the city when the news came! They would have kept holiday, and made it a "holy day," with a great service of thanksgiving to God. What a prominent figure Isaiah must have been. His prediction had come true. His God had proved that He could be trusted.

The losses of the Assyrians seem enormous, but history tells of disaster almost as great and as sudden, e.g. Napoleon's retreat from Moscow in 1812, when twenty thousand horses perished from frost in one night, and the French army was nearly annihilated.

(1) Jerusalem was saved. (2) Sennacherib perished by the sword in his own land (cp. *v.* 7 with *v.* 38).

(c) *What the Jews were to learn from this.*

God is always teaching the world by the events of history. How much He has been saying to us in the late war! Are we ready to learn, and be on the watch for God? See Habakkuk 2. 1, which describes what should be our attitude. The Jews would have learned these lessons:

(1) The Power of God, His rule over all nations.

(2) "Man proposes, God disposes." God overrules all human plans and uses them for His own ends.

(3) The goodness of God in giving them this opportunity for repentance. The best way of showing their gratitude would be by making their religion real. What was the matter with the nation? See Isaiah 1. Idolatry and

false worship would hide their heads after this proof of God's power and goodness. But, alas, it was a short-lived reformation. About twenty years after, under Manasseh, false worships were reintroduced.

How do we use the chances of repentance God gives us? How has England used the chance given by our victory in the late war?

(4) The present deliverance would have made them think of God's dealing with the nation in the past, the deliverance from Egypt, the guidance in the wilderness, the settlement in Canaan. All through He had been watching over them, leading them. How had they responded? They ought to have learned "to count up their mercies."

(d) *Why God cared for Jerusalem.*

Verse 35 says, "For I will defend this city to save it, for mine own sake, and for my servant David's sake."

(1) "For mine own sake." What does this mean? Two things. First, God by saving the city would prove that He was God, would, as it were, defend His own honour. Second, God had a plan for the nation, which was not yet completed. The Assyrians must not be allowed to interfere with that place. God had still much to teach the people through Isaiah and later prophets. If Jerusalem had perished all this teaching would not have been given.

(2) "For my servant David's sake." The promise made to David by God through Nathan (2 Sam. 7. 12-16; cp. Course I, 6). David had captured Jerusalem and made it the capital of his kingdom, and the centre of its worship. It was a city whose whole history was connected with religion. The Temple was there. The great feasts were held there. God cared for Jerusalem because it was the central place for the worship of Himself. Think what Jerusalem must have meant to thousands of pious Jews. We can grow fond of a church where we have worshipped

for years. Associations gather round it. It becomes a very sacred place to us. So it was with Jerusalem. God was, of course, not in Jerusalem *only*. Men could meet with Him anywhere ; but in the story of the nation there was no place more hallowed by the presence of God.

Jerusalem was destroyed later by Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians, but it was rebuilt, and a new temple erected, and it was in Jerusalem that the Saviour of the world was crucified and rose from the dead. God knew what was going to happen later, and how Jerusalem would become for the Christian a city even more sacred than it was to the Jew. God then cared for Jerusalem because of His promise to David and because of the religious significance of the city. Make clear again to the class that this was not favouritism. Privilege implies responsibility. The greater the privilege of Jerusalem the greater God's demand upon it. From Jerusalem God's truth should have gone out into all the world. "A city set on an hill cannot be hid."

LESSON IV. THE SICK BED OF A KING (*Isaiah 38*)

COMPARE the fuller narrative in 2 Kings 20. I-II.

(a) *Isaiah at the bedside.*

The scene in the palace. Servants moving about with hushed tread, anxiety on every face. In the city groups anxiously waiting outside palace for news. How the crowds gathered outside Buckingham Palace to read the latest bulletins when King Edward VII lay dying. King Hezekiah had no son to succeed him. All the more reason to pray for his recovery, for he was a good king.

Isaiah was at the palace. He had been the king's chief adviser and friend, and so was admitted to the sick-room : He stands by the bedside, and speaks to the king. What

is his message? "Thus saith the Lord, Set thine house in order; for thou shalt die, and not live."

A terrible task for Isaiah to tell the king this—cp. a doctor having to tell a patient that there is no hope of recovery. But he did not shrink from his duty. He did not want the king to die, for, though Hezekiah had disregarded the prophet's advice about making an alliance with Egypt, Isaiah knew that the king cared for God and the right, and really wished to rule his people well.

"Set thine house in order"—i.e. prepare to die. If there were any last directions the king wished to give, let him give them. Above all, let him make his peace with God, into whose presence he was so soon to pass.

We shall see how the king received the message. Meanwhile we may learn this lesson, that all life ought to be a setting of our house in order. We want so to live that death will find us ready to go. The story of the man suddenly visited by Death. He complains that Death has given him no warning, and that it is unfair to take him thus. Death agrees to put off his coming, and to give him warning. Thirty years later he came again. "But you have given me no warning," said the man. "No warning?" replied Death. "What of those grey hairs, that failing eyesight, those weakening limbs?" Death need have no terrors for us if we are Christ's disciples.

The fear of death. (a) The natural shrinking from the unknown. (b) The sinner's fear of death and judgment. (c) But Psalm 23. 4.

(b) *The King and the Prophet's message (vv. 2-4).*

When the king heard he turned his face to the wall. Ahab turned his face to the wall in displeasure at Naboth's refusal to give him the vineyard (1 Kings 21. 4). Was this Hezekiah's feeling? No; he wanted to be alone with God, to shut out the world, and to pray.

His prayer. It was not for recovery—at any rate that is not recorded. But he asks God to remember how he has tried to do what is right. He had been a good king (2 Kings 18. 3–6).

How does this prayer strike us? There is no confession of sin in it. Does it lack humility? Should we be content when dying to remind God of all our good deeds? We must remember that Jesus Christ has set a higher standard. A Christian could not quite pray this prayer.

Hezekiah wept sore. He was not an old man, had hoped to live longer. He clung to life. But his sadness was due in part to this, that he knew nothing of our Christian hope of immortality and a blessed home beyond the grave.

What did the Old Testament believer think about the future life? He believed that the spirit of the dead man lived in Sheol (=Hades) in an underworld below the earth, as a kind of thin ghost. Sheol was a joyless place. God was not there. It was a place of dust and darkness, from which there was no hope of return. See what Hezekiah says (38. 18) and compare the following descriptions of Sheol (Ps. 88. 4, 5; Job 7. 8–10; 17. 13–16; 10. 20–22). With such an outlook no wonder death was a sad and dread thing. Contrast the Christian's hope, based on Christ's victory over death that first Easter Day (John 11. 25 and 14. 1, 2—the house of many mansions; and Rev. 7. 16, 17).

(c) *Isaiah's second message. The King's recovery* (chap. 38. 4–8).

Compare carefully 2 Kings 20. 4–11, where the account is much fuller. There is a difference between the two accounts. In Kings Isaiah offers the king the choice of a sign as a promise that he will recover. In Isaiah's narrative there is no mention of the choice. Nor does

Isaiah mention the poultice of figs which we are told in Kings the prophet ordered to be put on the boil. [38. 21, 22 mentions both, but the verses are out of place there. It looks as if a later editor had inserted them to make the narrative agree with Kings.]

Picture the scene. Isaiah leaves the palace, having told the king he must die. Before he had gone far (2 Kings 20. 4) God gives him another message. He is to go back and tell the king that God has heard his prayer, and will grant him fifteen years more life ; and that he will be well enough in three days to go to the Temple (2 Kings 20. 5).

[From Isa. 38. 1 and 2 Kings 20. 1 it appears that Hezekiah became ill when Sennacherib was invading Judah, *i.e.* after 705 B.C. If we add on 15 years to the 20 years during which he had already been king (he came to the throne 727 or 725) this would make the length of his reign 35 years, which contradicts 2 Kings 18. 2. This has led some to put his illness during an earlier Syrian invasion by Sargon in 711. But there is no satisfactory proof that Sargon ever besieged Jerusalem. We are unable to explain the difficulty with our present knowledge.]

The shadow on the steps. A sun-dial, or sun-clock for measuring time. Sir G. Adam Smith writes : " The dial was probably a pyramid of steps, on the top of which stood a short pillar or obelisk. When the sun rose in the morning, the shadow cast by the pillar would fall right down the western side of the pyramid to the bottom of the lowest step. As the sun ascended the shadow would shorten, and creep up inch by inch to the foot of the pillar. After noon, as the sun began to descend to the west, the shadow would creep down the eastern steps ; and the steps were so measured that each one marked a certain degree of time. It was probably afternoon when Isaiah visited the king. The shadow was *going down*

according to the regular law ; the sign consisted in causing the shadow to shrink up the steps again."

Was this a miracle ? It can be explained by refraction, that is, some condition of the atmosphere which bends the sun's rays so that instead of shooting straight down they are angular. This is a well-known phenomenon in Nature. To quote Sir G. Adam Smith again : " In this case, instead of shooting straight over the top of the obelisk, the rays of the sun had been bent down and inward, so that the shadow fled up to the top of the obelisk."

We cannot reconcile the two versions. In Kings the sign is given in answer to Isaiah's prayer, and the king is offered a choice of a sign. If we had only the account in Isaiah we might suppose that the prophet going into the palace courtyard saw this strange sight of the shadow lying ten degrees higher up than its proper place. He pauses, looks at it, and then flashes into his mind this thought : " The king is not going to die after all. This is God's sign. He is giving me a message. I will go back and tell the king."

He goes back, tells the king, orders a poultice for the boil, and the king recovers.

[The teacher should frankly tell the children that there are difficulties in the Bible. With events so remote in time recorded in such ancient documents it is not surprising that some contradictory accounts should appear. The Bible was not dictated by God. It was written by men, who were indeed taught by God, but who were not kept by God from making at times errors.]

What must the king's feelings have been on hearing the news ? What should we feel in like case ?

(d) *What Hezekiah learned from his sickness* (chap. 38. 9-20).

We have the hymn or psalm which the king wrote on his recovery ; this shows what his thoughts were.

(1) Verses 10-14. Note the sadness and hopelessness of them. The king tells what he felt as he faced death with no hope of immortality. His bitterest thought was that he would not "see" God—i.e. hold communion with Him. He is to be plucked up from life as a shepherd's tent which is just pitched for a night; or as the weaver rolls up his finished web so will his life be rolled up.

(2) Verses 15-20. But his sadness is turned to joy when he hears he is to live.

In this latter half of the hymn certain thoughts occur which are worth noting.

(a) "Himself hath done it." He recognizes God's hand. "Thy will be done."

(b) "By these things men live, and wholly therein is the life of my spirit." It is not certain what the Hebrew text means; but may we not say that the king realized that trouble was good for his soul? "Man doth not live by bread alone." Often trouble or illness sends a man to God, and he comes out of his trouble a better man. [Cp. Course II, 4. How to bear Suffering.] "Behold it was for my peace that I had great bitterness" (cp. Heb. 12. 11).

(c) The king is very grateful, and shows his gratitude by praising God. We may be sure that the first thing he did on recovery was to go to the Temple. In the General Thanksgiving in the Prayer Book opportunity is given for a person to return thanks after recovery, when the prayers of the congregation have been offered on his behalf. Hezekiah is grateful for the renewed chance of fellowship with God, which he did not think was possible after death. Only the living could praise God (*v.* 19).

The news of his wonderful recovery and of the sign evidently spread outside the land of Judah, for we read in 2 Chronicles 32. 31 that the princes of Babylon sent "to inquire of the wonder that was done in the land."

LESSON V. ISAIAH AND TRUE RELIGION'
(Chap. 2. 10-18)

(a) *What was wrong with the religion of the people.*

(1) Superstition and magic had crept in (v. 6) from Arabia, Syria and the East. In China to-day much superstition—e.g. before you go a journey, or fix a date for a marriage, consult the magician. He pretends by observing the clouds, or by burning grass and watching the eddies of the smoke, to say whether the day is favourable. All this was forbidden to the Jews by the law of Moses.

(2) Too much love of riches. The country had grown rich by trade, especially by the trade in the Red Sea. This made the people forget God. England before the war. Were we too bent on money-making? What is your aim in life; to grow rich? But "we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out." "A shroud has no pockets." Our Lord's words: "How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God." Money can be a snare equally to the poorer classes.

(3) Idolatry (v. 8). But what did the Second Commandment tell them?

(4) Chapter I. 11-15. The outward observances of religion; but the true spirit not there (cp. Course I, 4. "The outward and inward in religion.")

(b) *True Religion* (I. 16, 17).

Conduct must match profession. The need of a good life. "By their fruits ye shall know them" (Matt. 7. 16-19). The people's first need was to give up sin. Then they must care for the widow and fatherless and those who have no protector. Note how all the prophets attack injustice. The poor man in the law-courts had very little chance. Judges and witnesses took bribes. All the

prophets stood for social righteousness. (Cp. James 1. 26, 27 and Micah 6. 8).

God's offer (*v.* 18) of pardon and cleansing. The prophets warn of God's wrath against sin, but they also tell of pardon and restoration.

Is it always true "by their fruits ye shall know them"? We cannot always tell. A man may be outwardly respectable in conduct, kind and seemingly religious, but all the while may be a hypocrite. God, however, knows; He reads the heart. But as a general rule you can tell from a man's actions what his religion is.

The true religion of a child. How will it show itself?

(1) Honesty, truthfulness, purity.

(2) Unselfishness, obedience at home.

(3) Doing your best at school—"playing the game."

(4) Trying to be like Jesus Christ.

(5) Telling God the wrong things you do and asking His pardon.

(c) *Sin and its Cure.*

Verse 16. "Wash you, make you clean." Could they do this by themselves? Can we by ourselves conquer our sins? To be made clean involves two things: (a) What we can do; (b) what God must do.

(a) What can we do? Make up our minds to try; really be in earnest. Here are the steps—"I ought—I can—I will." We can say, and mean it, "*I will.*" We can avoid places of temptation, bad companions or bad looks. But that is not enough. We must call for God's help.

(b) What God can do. He can give us His power through the Holy Spirit. Sin must be conquered if it is opposed by God, for God is mightier than sin. Jesus Christ, the Sinless One, proved that. St. Paul said, "I can do all things in him that strengtheneth me" (Phil. 4. 13).

Sin is cured when it is driven out of the life. When is a

sick man cured? When the poison caused by the illness is driven out of his body. A sick man only gradually gets well. So only gradually can sin be conquered; but every victory makes the next easier.

The prophets had such a clear view of sin because they had such a clear view of God's holiness. They always took God's point of view about sin. We sometimes take man's point of view, and treat sin lightly. We shall keep our thoughts about sin right if we think what it cost Jesus on the Cross to redeem it, if we remember that sin hurts God, wounds His heart.

(d) *The character of God.*

The word "character" comes from a Greek word meaning "to cut or engrave." What you engrave on metal lasts—cutting your name on a tree. The idea is that of fixity, permanence. As applied to a person character means those qualities or attributes which mark the person and which are deep-seated. By the character of God we mean the permanent qualities of God, the nature or being of God. St. James (1. 17) calls God "the Father of lights with whom can be no variation." God does not change. He is always the same.

What did Isaiah know about God?

(1) His holiness—"the Holy One of Israel." His hatred of evil.

(2) His Power and Majesty (2. 21, 22 and 6).

(3) His readiness to forgive (1. 18).

(4) His care for Israel, the covenant people (37. 35).

(5) He was a self-revealing God, teaching His people about Himself.

(6) He was a Redeeming God, wanting to save His people. One day He would bring in the perfect kingdom (11. 1-10).

Make clear to the class that God's attitude toward us is always the same. But it depends on us whether He can

give effect to His will towards us. He loves us, but if we will not repent His love *must* turn to judgment. A mother loves her child even when it does wrong. But she cannot make her love effective if the child is not sorry. The moment the child is sorry the mother's love forgives the past and a happier relationship is set up between them.

All the prophets insist that God's promises of blessing and warnings about punishment are conditional. The blessing cannot be given if the nation will not receive it. The punishment need not come, if the nation will repent.

Does the Christian know more about God's character than Isaiah did?

(1) He knows more clearly that God is love—"Our Father."

(2) He sees in Jesus Christ the nature of God. There is God before his eyes.

(3) He knows more clearly the depths of the divine pity and mercy when he looks at the Cross.

All that Isaiah said about God the Christian believes, but he can grasp it all better because Jesus Christ lived out before men's eyes the character of God.

LESSON VI. A PROPHECY OF THE FUTURE (Chap. 35)

(a) *The Prophet looking forward.* (Compare Courses I, 6 and II, 5, 6.)

Historical Note. This chapter, though included in the writings of Isaiah, almost certainly belongs to a later date. Some verses, e.g. 4 and 10 seem to be addressed to the Jews in exile, before they have been restored to Palestine; and so the passage is not by Isaiah, who died more than a century before the captivity. The class should know the outline of the story; the fall of the Northern kingdom before the Assyrians in 722 or 721 B.C.;

the capture of Jerusalem and the fall of the Southern kingdom before the Babylonians, 586 B.C.; the first return of the exiles in 538 after Cyrus, the Persian king, had conquered Babylon.

For the purpose of the lesson, however, the chapter can be treated simply as a typical picture of the better time coming, to which the prophets looked forward. It illustrates this important point that the *details* of the pictures must not always be pressed. It is the general spirit and idea which matters.

The prophets looked forward. God had some better thing in store for the nation. He was a redeeming God, and would work some great act of deliverance. They did not know exactly when this would happen, or the exact manner of it. All they were sure of was that God was going to redeem His people and establish a perfect kingdom.

[Fill in from lessons in earlier courses.]

(b) *The Picture in this chapter of the good time coming.*

(1). A desert, no flowers, only sand and a few coarse weeds. No waters, the ground parched. Unless the traveller across the desert knows where the wells are he will perish from thirst. Hence across the desert there are fixed caravan routes going by the wells. A desert well with its cluster of palm trees and grass. How glad the traveller and camels are to reach it.

The prophet sees the desert "blossoming as the rose"—the autumn crocus is probably meant, or else the narcissus which grows plentifully in the plain of Sharon. It shall become as rich in vegetation as Mount Carmel or Lebanon, or the plain of Sharon noted for its flowers. Springs of water will burst out in it (*vv.* 6, 7), and the parched ground will become a pool. In the solitary places among the rocks of the desert jackals had their lairs. Sheep could not feed

there ; but now it will be green with grass and reeds and rushes (*v.* 7).

(2.) Across the desert went the caravan tracks, rough roads, heavy with sand. Dangers at night from wild beasts lurking behind rocks or bushes. But now there is a broad highway (*v.* 8) which no traveller can miss, and there are no lions or ravenous beasts (*v.* 9). Travellers who are tired or faint-hearted need not be afraid (*vv.* 3, 4). Indeed there will be no feeble travellers, for blind and deaf and lame will be healed, and the dumb will sing (*vv.* 5, 6).

(3) Across the desert, down this broad highway, the prophet sees a great company travelling. Who are they ? There is a wider and a narrower answer to this question. In the first instance they are the exiles returning from Babylon back to their native land. They are "ransomed" and "redeemed," brought back, as it were, out of slavery. They came singing. The old sad days in a strange land are gone. "Sorrow and sighing shall flee away." How eagerly they must have looked out for the first glimpse of Judah's hills, the first peep of Jerusalem !

The Meaning of the Picture.

(a) We have seen that in the first instance it refers to the return from exile.

(b) But it has a wider meaning. Is it not a picture of the time when the perfect kingdom will come, when sin shall be done away, and pain and sorrow ? See the description of the Holy City in Revelation. Note the name of the broad highway—"the way of holiness."

God wants to redeem us from the captivity of sin, to set our feet in the way of holiness, and bring us to the land of everlasting joy. Sin makes a desert of the heart, kills the beautiful flowers of purity and humility, and in place ugly weeds grow up. God can turn that desert into a

garden. And He can give us in our hearts springs of water, the water of life, ever renewing us by His Spirit (cp. John 4. 14).

(c) *Has the better time come? Did Jesus Christ bring it?*

Prophecy pointed forward to the coming of a King, a Redeemer, a perfect kingdom. The hope of the Old Testament received its fulfilment in Christ. But His work is not yet finished. The perfect kingdom has not yet come on earth completely. We must distinguish, therefore, between what Christ did, and what still remains to be done before His work is finally accomplished.

Think of Christ as the centre-point of history. All the lines of the past led up to Him. Then from Him go out new lines, new developments which point onward still to a perfect kingdom. Therefore the kingdom has both come and is coming.

(1) *What Christ did.* He revealed God as Father. He conquered sin and death. He proved Himself Lord of heaven and earth. He introduced a new kingdom—i.e. a new mode of life, new principles which were to work like leaven in human life, and transform it. And above all He gave power to men to live as citizens of the new kingdom. In Christ men were to find their pattern, and the power to live true to it.

(2) *What Christ is waiting to do.* Christ is not idle, waiting till the judgment day doing nothing. He is sending His power and life into men, trying to make the kingdom which He set up spread and grow. The success of His work depends on us, for He works through us. We are His "Body"—His hands and eyes and feet. One day the work will be completed, and all things will be "summed up" in Christ (Eph. 1. 10). That will be what we call Heaven, the happy, sinless kingdom.

The point, therefore, to make clear is that in one sense

the kingdom has come, for Christ brought it ; in another sense it is still in the future, coming gradually, coming in proportion as men will let Christ work through them. Therefore Christianity, too, like prophecy, looks forward. God is a God who is always waiting to give richer and richer blessings to men (1 John 3. 2).

(d) "*Thy Kingdom come.*" *What does it mean ?*

It is not a prayer that the end of the world may come. The next clause in the Lord's Prayer explains it. "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." If God's will were perfectly done on earth the perfect kingdom would have come.

No war, strikes, prisons, hatred, etc. Sin would be done away, and with it the bulk of suffering. Try to picture what the world would be like if God's will were done on earth.

Is it enough for us to pray that prayer? No ; we must work for the coming of the kingdom. We are "members of Christ" and therefore members of the kingdom. We must try to live as such.

How to help bring in this kingdom.

(1) Begin with our own hearts. "The kingdom of God is within you." Does Christ rule in my heart ?

(2). At home. We can help by obedience, unselfishness, etc.

(3) Our influence in the place where we live.

(4) When we grow up we can try to be intelligent citizens of our country, and help to get some of our social evils abolished.

The kingdom comes slowly. Might it not come much more quickly ? We hinder it by our sin, and our selfishness. Think how much more quickly the heathen would become Christian if people at home would support Foreign Missions. If the League of Nations could become a real

power war would stop. God could do so much more, if we would help Him more readily. He brings in the kingdom. It is His power that can change men's hearts. But He cannot force us to be good or force the kingdom upon us. We must want to work with Him and receive His power.

The Parables of the kingdom are parables of slow growth. Jesus Christ knew that because of men's selfishness the kingdom would come slowly; but the pace at which it comes is not something fixed. It varies according to our readiness to help.

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